Christmas 1949

THE LITTLE LESS

To Vivian with much love.

Uncle Ernest

By the same Author :

THE PERPLEXED HEART

THE SPINNING WHEEL

ANGELA DU MAURIER

THE LITTLE LESS

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All characters and incidents in this book are entirely fictitious, and no reference is intended to any person living or dead.

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TO

MUMMIE

WITH DEAREST LOVE

PART ONE

I

It was an early April morning, not yet quite seven o'clock. Vivian Osborne slowly woke to semi-consciousness. At the back of her mind something, something important, was trying to force itself into her brain. A loud hall clock started to chime, followed by the noises of doors being banged, radiators being coaled and the distant sound of servants' voices. She yawned, stretched, still refusing to open her eyes. There was still half an hour before she would have to get up. Then suddenly Vivian remembered —it was Thursday, Maundy Thursday, and her Confirmation. A warm glow fell upon her ; she felt extraordinarily happy and calm, yet with a feeling of some vague elation. At sixteen and a half she was rather older than most of the other Woodbridge girls who were to be confirmed with her. Miss Macdonald, the head mistress, had strong Anglo-Catholic prejudices that all her girls should receive Sacraments at an early age. Vivian, however, had not come to Woodbridge till she was fifteen, and because she was motherless and her father, on the rare occasions when he thought about religion at all, a rabid Protestant, she had grown up in 'shameful neglect' according to Flora Macdonald.

She was a queer mixture of girlhood, shy of other girls, rebellious at times against the order and discipline with which schools are ruled, yet too timid to voice discontent. All her life she had lived with a fond but completely unresponsive father, with no women but a garrulous old

nurse and a series of rather vapid, impersonal governesses; and the vortex of school life had for a time seemed a pell-mell of bewilderment, terror, stupidity and excitement.

Her mother had died bringing a dead son into the world when Vivian was four. Colonel Osborne had never married again, and no one ever knew how much he felt his wife's death and the frustrated hope of an heir; he was extremely reticent about all such intimate subjects. When Vivian was on the way to this world it had been old Doctor Templeton who had informed him of the fact; the Colonel—so went the story—yawning ever so slightly and replying: "Oh—ah . . . I shouldn't have thought . . ." walked out of the room, only to return a few minutes later remarking: "I shouldn't have thought you would have missed the opening Meet this morning." The same John Templeton told the story of Mrs. Osborne's death, and of the Colonel once more hiding all emotion by ejaculating: "Oh, dear . . . oh, dear . . ." and seeming to be more embarrassed than anything else. No flowers and no mourners or followers were allowed by the bitter man, as he said his last farewell by his wife's and tiny son's grave, and the next week he sailed for Canada for two years, letting Dulbridge, and sending Vivian and her nurse to the latter's home.

As Vivian lay in bed this Maundy Thursday morning her mind wandered back to hitherto forgotten scenes of childhood. Of her early Ramsgate days with Nursie she remembered nothing, and only the very haziest bits of her father's and her return to Devon. Flowers . . . when she was a very tiny child the Dulbridge gardens had been full of them, and she could just remember a great uprooting of all that beauty and colour when Father returned from Canada. No flowers at all were grown in the many acres at Dulbridge, except for the age-old rhododendrons that

bloomed year by year, so high they seemed veritable trees and the flowers almost beyond one's reach. Not a bloom, not a plant was allowed in the house. Vivian remembered asking old Timms, the butler, once :

" Timms, why is it that we don't grow flowers here ? I do think it's silly—I shall speak to Father about it."

" I shouldn't do that, Miss," the old man had replied. " You see, Miss, the Colonel had them all up when your mother died."

" Whatever for ? " she had asked.

" I believe Mrs. Osborne was passionately fond of flowers and gardening, Miss, and your father blamed it all along o' that."

" How could Mother's dying be affected by loving flowers, Timms ? You're all wrong—you are silly, she had a baby and they both died."

The old butler had drawn himself up to his full height, and though he was secretly devoted to her, even she could not be allowed to doubt his word.

" Mrs. Osborne, your mother, was on a ladder in the rock garden, Miss Vivian ; it fell—and with it the poor lady. She never recovered. I think," he added, " your father had the flowers destroyed here as a sort of revenge, one might almost say."

It was then that a feeling of indignation had seized her. She was about ten at the time. She asked to be shown her mother's grave, and Nursie, nothing loth for any morbid curiosity, had walked the child into Putten-St.-Anne's, where all the Osbornes were buried. Having stood by a bleak, unkempt-looking grave for some time, the little girl said :

" But it was Mother's we came to see. I'm sick of this one."

" Hush, Vivian, you don't speak disrespective of graves —and this is your mother's."

Vivian stood for a long time, saying nothing.

"Does my father never come here?" she asked.

"Not he," replied Nursie. "He can't abide cemeteries."

Not a word did Vivian speak all the way home. Nursie thought she was tired, and probably bored, and didn't notice the big drops welling into her eyes and trickling down her cheeks. She felt a sudden grudge against her father. Surely he was selfish. She was only ten, but she felt that her mother must be feeling rather lonely lying in that cold-looking grave without so much as a wild primrose on it.

The next day she approached Williams, the head gardener, and asked him to give her a plot of ground, "just for my own, away back behind the vegetables, where even Father wouldn't see."

"Yu shoaley bain't goin' t' plant un flowers, Miss Vivian?" he'd asked, with almost awe in his voice.

"Yes, I am," she'd answered. "And what's more, Williams, I shall put the flowers on my mother's grave."

She felt she was starting a crusade—her voice almost shook with suppressed fear and excitement. Williams said nothing, and all that night she was terrified he would betray her and tell her father. But next morning, when she was having her eleven o'clock biscuits and milk, he mysteriously beckoned her from behind some bushes.

"Coom wi' me," and he led her round the back of the house and stables to his own cottage, and showed her a tiny little plot.

"Don't yu be tellin' anyone," he almost whispered, and pushed four small packets of seeds into her hand.

Vivian had nearly thrown her arms round his neck in gratitude. What a friend to find!

Then started her Crusading Days. She saved her weekly pocket-money, threepence a week, for fresh packets,

and on those too-good-to-be-true 'days-off' of Nursie's she and Williams would trudge off through the wood and over the fields to the little graveyard, sowing new seeds on the grave itself to start with, and picking the flowers from her own garden later.

She lay in bed trying to remember more half-forgotten relics of her childhood. It was so near, yet so uneventful had it been that there were few memories of it left in her mind.

Not until she was about eleven and a half had her father taken much notice of her. Shy and awkward of women always, he felt nothing in common with the rather plain, leggy, sullen-looking little girl who was growing up beside him. If it had been a son—yet he felt no real resentment for the fact that she was a girl. Just a slight bewilderment, which he expressed by ignoring her with deferential politeness. An occasional 'good morning' and 'good night' seemed the easiest way out for both of them.

When the time had come for education to begin he asked his sister to take full charge. From the time Vivian was about eight Aunt Julia had stepped in, shouldering all such responsibilities with extreme care, but with less than she gave her Welfare Committees, her Rescue Home or her Girls' Saturday Soirées. Faded faces groped their way into Vivian's mind as she tried to remember the straggling list of early governesses. Pale, anæmic Miss Tompson—when she came, why she left. The ginger-haired Belgian Mademoiselle, such a failure and so disliked by Nursie. It must have been after her hurried departure that the flower-growing had started, for there had been no governesses about the place then. During the War quite a number of well-meaning and inadequate spinsters had tried their hand. Either the place was too lonely or they couldn't put up with Nursie's patronising disdain.

One even went so far as to give the Colonel as an excuse for quitting. Mrs. Drew—Aunt Julia—had opened her eyes in astonishment. Vivian had been in the hall and couldn't resist listening.

"I'm sorry, Mrs. Drew, but I fear I shall not be able to go on teaching Vivian. . . ."

"Dear, dear, what is it this time?" her aunt had answered wearily. Her canteen work and the Stalton Mission made her niece's education seem so irritatingly trivial.

"It's the Colonel's behaviour. . . ."

"What!" said Aunt Julia in indignant surprise, "you're surely not going to accuse my brother of offensive behaviour?" And the woman—Vivian could not remember her name—had cut in icily:

"The Colonel has never so much as said good morning to me since he returned on leave."

The War was hazy in her mind. Her father had been in France, had commanded his old battalion in the Fusiliers until a bad leg wound made him unfit for further foreign service. But, isolated in Dulbridge as she was, the actual war had meant very little in her own life. True, the place had been shut down somewhat, but then there had never been much entertaining. Certain gardeners had gone away and not returned; Williams went about grumbling at the land girls who sought for the vacant places, and grumbled more when they left for work of greater national importance. Even food rationing at Dulbridge had meant very little.

With the end of the War, and her father back, life had gone on very much the same, but for the new change in the Colonel. He seemed to be aware at last that he had a young girl in the place who could no longer be completely ignored. On her fourteenth birthday he asked her what

sort of a present she would like, and she had replied: "A dog, please." He had been surprised, but pleased. They went all over the county together to the various dog-shows and trials, and finally they chose a blue roan cocker.

Peter was the first of what soon became a mania with the middle-aged man. Animals had always appealed to him in a detached sort of way, horses more than dogs. Before the War he had been a keen follower to hounds, in the days before Vivian could remember. And now that the War was over, and hunting was banned to him because of his wound, Colonel Osborne became bitten with a new craze—dogs. Kennels were installed, a kennelman engaged, a valuable 'wife' was bought for Peter, and the first excitement Vivian had ever seen her father evince was when Sally gave birth to her first litter. From then on he became a different man. It seemed as though for years he'd been shut up in a shell and was seeing people and life for the first time. He bought a new car, a Napier, and the autumn that Vivian went to school had seen him accepting invitations to shoots. Little by little people had drawn him out, told each other he'd been a misjudged man hitherto—and on more than one occasion he was found to be amusing company, with some good stories to tell, as the evening wore on and glasses emptied.

He still kept his reserved manner where women were concerned, but towards his own daughter he certainly unbent, and a definite though extremely undemonstrative friendship grew up between them, founded on a shy pride and genuine liking on the Colonel's side and a feeling of trust, respect and, in some vague way, pity on the girl's.

When Vivian was fifteen Aunt Julia interfered once more, saying it was high time the girl was sent to school. The Colonel looked doubtful, and Vivian scared, but her aunt remained adamant.

"Nonsense," she retorted to her niece's excuses of:

"But I don't know any girls," and "I don't know nearly enough, I'm sure," and "What will all the dogs do without me to exercise them?"

"It's high time you knew other girls your own age. You'll grow up gauche, dull and stupid, or an ignorant hoyden. And if you don't know as much as other girls do—well, all I can say is that I shall think it ungrateful after all the trouble I've taken in finding suitable governesses for you since you were a small child. As to your other excuse—your dogs—I never heard anything so absurd. Pullen is a trained kennelman and can look after them quite as well as you can."

Vivian turned beseeching eyes to her father, but he only coughed and murmured:

"Perhaps, my dear, your aunt is right. You really should mix with younger people, and there are none of your own age near us. After all, if you'd been a boy you'd have gone to school long ago."

So it was decided, and in September Vivian set off for Woodbridge Abbey, chosen for her by Aunt Julia who knew Miss Macdonald. Her father drove her as far as Exeter, saw her into a first-class carriage, and bought her copies of *The Field*, *Our Dogs*, *Punch* and *The Sphere*. It was a slightly embarrassing moment for both of them—she felt so very near to tears, and he was struck for the first time how very like his dead wife she was growing.

"I'm afraid you may have to change for Guildford, but the guard will come and tell you. I've fixed everything up with him." There was a pause, and she said:

"Keep Peter with you more than the other dogs, won't you? He may miss . . ." She felt her eyes smart, words became too difficult.

"I'll keep a good watch on him, you needn't worry."

"I expect I shall be made to write to you—I believe it's a rule—but I don't suppose you'll have time to, will you?" she asked, rather sadly.

At that minute the whistle blew, and she realised that she was off. . . . Neither of them were aware that she left without one kiss, one hug—with nothing more than a handshake.

. . . . . .

Vivian stretched herself and put out her hand for her watch. Heavens! how the time had flown—twenty minutes to eight, prayers in another twenty minutes.

She began to get up hastily, not stopping for the cold bath she could have taken, quickly washing her face and hands, giving her teeth a half-hearted scrub. She was at the age where such things did not seem to matter very much. She took slightly more trouble with her hair, carefully plaiting it into two long pigtails. She gazed for a second or two in the looking-glass and wished she wasn't plain. Her skin was too pale, her dank hair rather lifeless; nobody had yet told her what magnetism lay in two big grey eyes, and she would have laughed anyone to scorn had they told her that her rather tall, flat, boyish figure which she secretly despised would be considered her greatest attraction a few years hence.

A loud bell rang, and Vivian ran downstairs, joining all the other girls in the big assembly room where prayers were said.

There was a hushed silence as Miss Macdonald and the other mistresses came into the room. The tall, almost soldier-like figure, the arrogant turn of the head, those eyes that could hold so much kindness or so much scorn sent a quiver of emotion through Vivian. She adored this woman with an intense adoration. She was so far the only

person who had been anything of an influence in Vivian's life. And her power was gaining ground everyday. This year, Vivian's second, was easier with the other girls solely because she felt Flora Macdonald's opinion of her would be higher if she tried to be more friendly, to come out of her shell. It was entirely owing to the head mistress that Vivian was taking her Confirmation with the others to-day. In spite of her father's protests and her own rather bigoted dislike for religion of any sort—due to the almost Nonconformist church at home, where Matins were said on Sunday mornings and labelled Morning Prayer—she soon fell under the sway of Flora Macdonald's ardent Anglo-Catholicism and had written home begging to be allowed to be confirmed for Easter.

"Girls," said the head mistress as she stood up behind her desk, "I want you all this morning to give a very special prayer for those of you who are to be confirmed to-day. Those of you who are to have this happiness know already, I hope, from the help and guidance of Father Andrews, a little of the joy that is to be yours in future. I want you all to realise that pure spiritual happiness has no equal on earth. It lies with Christ, our only Mediator and Comforter. And in the days ahead that must sometimes seem black and burdensome, when you feel unhappy, weary or indignant at unkindness—and all of you must go through such times sooner or later—remember that such moments are sent to test your character, to strengthen your spiritual armour. For what are we all, I hope, but Christian soldiers? And when those moments come, I say, kneel down and pray, bless God for your Holy Confirmation to-day, thanking Him and realising, as you will, the joy and happiness of being able to partake in the greatest Sacrament, which you will do for the first time on Easter morning. Those of you who have already been confirmed

will pray that your friends may be lightened by the blessed Help and Guidance that you know yourselves is unfailing and unlimited. And those of you who are not yet old enough, or advanced enough, to come this way yourselves, kneel and pray that that time may not be so far away."

Miss Macdonald looked at the rows of young faces below her. Yes, they were good girls, dear girls, she loved them all, was proud of them. When worries and frictions arose, as they sometimes did, she told herself that it was probably due to some failure of her own. No vicar in his parish, no abbess of a convent, ever tried more conscientiously to help their 'Children of God' than she did.

Vivian was deeply affected by Miss Macdonald's words. As she knelt down to pray, her thoughts soared. She thought of the beauty of this strange new thing she was soon to know, and she had to bite her lips hard not to let tears of emotion well up into her eyes. Emotion of any sort whatsoever was considered bad form, she had very soon discovered—though the girls would shout themselves hoarse at a school hockey match. Strange, that these conflicting feelings should be growing in her. She often asked herself why.

School life and life at home were so utterly different, perhaps that was a reason in itself. At home one existed—one ate, slept, exercised the dogs, and read the *Morning Post* over with Father, with an occasional discussion on local interests. Here, one was continually on the go from morning till night, rushing from one place to another, with exams to study for, debates to listen to, games to excel in, or try to—and it was a bad outlook for the girl who couldn't run, or pass a ball efficiently, or slacked. And then the petty jealousies, the storms over tea-cups, the 'sets.' And the favourings of the lesser mistresses, and the sarcastic retorts of certain members of the Sixth.

No, it all seemed very weird and inexplicable to Vivian at first, and over all shone the steady influence and power of the head mistress.

As it was Holy Week there were few actual lessons going on in the school. The mornings were given up to historical reading or literature ; a French master to be read, perhaps, or a simpler essay by one of the Divines. Those who studied art and music did so, giving extra hours to it this week. Some of the younger ones took their sewing into the garden, where Mademoiselle read to them. Vivian was practising a Chopin prelude when another girl strolled in. "Hullo—are you playing?" she said. Vivian thought it an obvious remark, but she hadn't quite the courage to say so.

"I say, are you keen about to-day? . . ." The girl started fingering the pieces of music, letting them fall in scattering sheets about the floor.

"Yes, I am, rather," said Vivian shortly. It was a sacred topic to her ; she did hope Joan Adams would go soon and not loaf about trying to gossip.

"Wasn't old Mac a scream this morning? What a thing she did make of it all."

"How d'you mean?" she asked, rather coldly.

"Oh, you know," the other girl yawned, "all this Confirmation stuff. I can't say it's ever meant such a lot to me. I thought I looked rather nice in the veil, though."

Vivian was so shocked she could think of nothing to say.

"Are your people coming down?"

"No," said Vivian, "I've only got a father. I don't think he's very interested. And my only other relation is an aunt, and she's such a strict Protestant that if she saw all the candles and vestments and things we have

she'd probably take me away from school. Anyway, she'd be too busy," she added.

"Have they sent you any presents?" Joan asked.

"My old nurse sent me a Prayer Book," Vivian said. "I thought it was very kind of her."

Joan laughed. "I had a little gold cross given me, it was quite plain, and in the hols I changed it for a bracelet."

Vivian turned round on the seat and started to play a scale.

"Well," said the other, "I suppose I'd better be off, seeing as how you're supposed to be practising."

Vivian sighed with relief. As the other girl reached the door she stopped suddenly.

"Good Lord, I'd quite forgotten why I came in—Miss Macdonald wants to see you."

Vivian blushed furiously. "Why on earth didn't you say so at once?" She leapt from the piano-stool, throwing her music anyhow into its case.

"Steady on, my girl. She's not leaving, you know! And she won't eat you. Anyone would think she was an ogre."

Vivian glared.

"It's not that at all. But she mustn't be kept waiting naturally—specially by me," she added, as though to herself. Joan looked surprised and faintly amused.

"Oh, it's like that, is it? Got a crush on Mac. Good gracious, what a scream!"

But Vivian was out of the room by then and hadn't heard. Flying to the study door, almost breathless, she knocked. She could hear her own heart beating.

"Come in," said a rather stern voice.

"I'm so very sorry," she began, "but——"

"My dear child, whatever's the matter?"

"Joan has only just told me you wanted to see me," said Vivian, "and——"

Miss Macdonald laughed. "I said when she saw you to tell you. There was no immediate hurry. Sit down. I wanted to have just a little talk before this afternoon. You are feeling happy, Vivian dear, about it all, aren't you?"

"Oh, yes, Miss Macdonald. Indeed I am. I don't know how to thank you——"

"Me, my dear? I've got very little to do with it."

"Oh, but you don't understand," said Vivian impulsively. "It's you really that's meant everything. At least, I mean——" she faltered. Flora Macdonald put on her pince-nez and looked at the flurried little face. A dear child. . . .

"Now tell me quietly and slowly. There's lots of time. I'm very glad I've been able to help you. But I think it's our dear Father Andrews really."

"Oh, yes, I know," said Vivian, "but I didn't really mean that. You see. . . . Isn't it funny, I feel I can speak quite easily to you in here. You see, when I first came here last year, well . . . it all seemed so horribly strange and funny. I'm afraid I didn't like it. I felt sort of lonely and homesick."

"But that's quite natural."

"Well, with lots of girls it is, but there's nobody at home that's ever helped me over anything, ever been very nice or kind——"

She noticed Miss Macdonald's look of surprise.

"Please don't think I'm being sorry for myself, or anything like that. But Father—for instance, all we have in common really is the dogs! I like him very much, but until a few years ago he never took any notice of me at all. It never struck me as anything odd until I came to school, and heard everyone talking of their fathers and mothers, and their brothers and sisters, and getting letters

from them, and—why, Father has only written to me four times the whole time I've been at school." She smiled.

"I've got my old nurse, of course, but even she's not like other people's nannies. She's just always been there and I think we both take each other for granted." There was a pause.

"How old were you when your mother died, Vivian?"

"Oh, very little. I can't remember her at all. I do wish I had a mother—it must be simply lovely. Aunt Julia is the only person I know really, grown-up person, I mean. You know her, don't you? Do you know her well? You're not at all like her."

"We were at school together, and sometimes I see her nowadays. She's never been here," she added.

"Oh, please, please, Miss Macdonald, don't ask her to come," Vivian begged. "You see, she might want to take me away."

"Why should she want to do that?" she asked.

"She's such a fearful bigot. I know she would if she knew how high you are. What I mean to say is," she spoke hurriedly, "if she realised what a Catholic sort of place this is."

Flora Macdonald thought for a few minutes.

"And you want to stay now, do you?"

"Oh, but I've always wanted that," she laughed, shyly.

"Well, my dear, I'm glad you're settling down happily at last. I was afraid last term you weren't going to."

"Oh, but it's all you. If it wasn't for you I don't suppose I'd want to stop another day. The other girls are quite all right, I suppose, but you see I've never known any girls my own age, and somehow I think they think I'm an awful fool. But you were always so kind to me—you've made me see new things, you're the only person that has ever made me realise what other girls have in their mothers.

Please don't think it impertinent telling you, and please don't tell anyone I've told you," she hastily added.

Flora Macdonald took off her pince-nez, stood up and blew her nose. What a very dear child this was. She must see to it that she never let it find itself astray again while in her keeping. Her eyes fell on an open page in her Bible lying on her desk. The verse that caught her eye was, 'Whosoever offendeth one of these little ones . . .'

"My dear," she said, turning to the girl, "I'm very glad you've spoken as you have to me. Believe me, I take it as a privilege that you should feel as you do about me." Sentiment warmed the heart of the elderly woman. "And if I can fill a mother's place in any shape or form, I shall be very happy. God bless you, dear child. I shall be thinking of you very much to-day, and will say a special prayer for you."

Vivian's heart glowed with love and gratitude. "It's you I have to thank for to-day. This new Catholic faith is very beautiful to me. Religion never meant anything to me till I met you."

"Poor dear; you see, you've been so dreadfully neglected."

"Oh, well, I dare say it was my own fault. I could have found it, somewhere."

"But haven't you? And the first opportunity, too. No, you needn't blame yourself there, my dear. And now I must send you away because, though we've talked more of yourself as a girl than yourself as a child about to take a big step and a big Sacrament, I must see one or two of the others. First of all, I want to give you this," and she gave Vivian a little green book with F. marked in gold across the top. "It's my favourite devotional book. I always give one to each girl when she's confirmed."

Vivian glowed with pleasure.

" Oh, thank you, Miss Macdonald. You are kind." She opened the little book; on the fly-leaf was inscribed 'To Vivian Osborne, in memory of her Confirmation. F.McD.' and the date. Vivian turned to go.

" Wait. I'm going to give you a special book to yourself. It's a very, very beautiful book, one I'm fonder of than almost anything. It's called *The Imitation of Christ*." Flora Macdonald held in her hand a rather faded *suède* edition. " This is one of two my mother gave me—and I'm going to give it to you. Read it when you say your prayers at night. And tell me if you don't feel the beauty of it."

Vivian walked towards the desk and watched over the mistress's shoulder as she wrote: 'To Vivian, with affection. Flora Macdonald.'

" There you are, my dear, and remember, you are always to come to me in any trouble, great or small. And when you're specially happy over anything, too. I do want to help you."

She patted the girl's shoulder and bent and kissed her forehead. It was the very first time anyone had kissed Vivian. She smiled up at the older woman's eyes, and walked quietly out of the room. All she could think of was the feeling of belonging or meaning something to someone, even a little, at last. That the person should be her wonderful Miss Macdonald seemed almost unspeakably unreal. For a time she just leant out of her window, ecstasy in her heart. Presently she knelt down by her bed and said: " Oh, please, God, let me be worthy of all this. Do make me good. I do want to be good. And let Miss Macdonald never be disappointed in me. Don't let me ever fail her. She's so good and wonderful. Help me to grow up as like her as possible. And bless me this afternoon."

She sprang to her feet, and seized hold of the à Kempis. The leaves fluttered in her fingers. Suddenly her eyes fell on the beginning of a chapter :

'Love watcheth, and sleeping slumbereth not, weary is not tired, straitened is not constrained, frightened is not disturbed ; but like a living flame and a burning torch it bursts forth upwards and safely overpasses all. Whosoever loves, knoweth the cry of this voice.'

"How lovely," she whispered ; "how beautiful !"

. . . . . .

Vivian came down into the hall a little early. It was empty. The girls with their relations and other visitors had gone on to the chapel. The Confirmation candidates were to start off later. On the hall table she saw a letter—it was addressed to her. Her father's writing—she must have overlooked it at lunch-time. He must have remembered the Day after all, that was dear of him, she thought. With eager hands she tore open the envelope.

'MY DEAR VIVIAN,' it ran,

'I'm sorry I haven't written you for such a long time. We've had a very busy time lately, and both Deirdre and Queenie have had new litters. Deirdre's are fine—four dogs and two bitches, but we had a ticklish time with Queenie and only just managed to keep her. She only had three pups, all born dead. I shan't ever use that dog of old Marsden's again.

'Frost has been lying on the ground, which has made the going a bit difficult round here. Did I tell you I'd taken up riding again ? Find it does my rheumatism good, oddly enough. Been trying some animals, and am seeing a mare to-morrow ; I hope to get you interested when you come home, and we'll see about

fixing you up. You used to ride as a child on the Shetland before it died, so I daresay you won't feel at a complete loss.

'Here is £3 for an Easter egg. Let me know what time to expect you next week.

Your affectionate

FATHER.

'P.S.—Some people called Tyler have taken the Grange for a long period of time. Don't know anything about them. Thought it would interest you.'

Vivian bit her lip—not a word about to-day. She felt slightly resentful—disappointed. It meant such a lot to her. Yet she couldn't help smiling. It was quite a long letter for her father—typical, too, to think only of the animals. After all, it was their closest bond of union, so why blame him? But if only the letter had come yesterday or to-morrow. It was kind of him to send her three pounds. And she vaguely wondered who the Tylers would be. Old, she supposed,—there were never any young people at home.

Later, kneeling in the little church, she told herself this was the happiest moment in her life. This lovely new feeling of 'belonging' and security. She and the other white-frocked girls took up the front pews; they looked rather like a little band of very young nuns as they stood, their white veils hanging from their heads, hair invisible, awe in their eyes, ready to make their vows of allegiance. As they all answered "I do," Vivian did not feel she was one of many called upon to declare solemnly what nearly all men and women are supposed to declare on reaching years of discretion. She felt she was there alone, the service was hers—it was up to her from now on

to give to God all that was hers to give. As the Bishop laid his hands on her head and blessed her, a wave of almost fanatical emotion ran through her, and when the organ pealed and was joined by the hundred young voices singing 'Come, Holy Ghost, Our Hearts Inspire,' she thought what a pity it was she lived so many hundreds of years too late, and how she could have died as Joan and others, a martyr for her faith. A zealot's fire burned in her eyes.

So wrapt up in her dreams was she that when returning to her place from being blessed by the Bishop, she walked half-way down the aisle and into the wrong pew. She looked up and found herself looking at a completely strange face, and she realised her mistake. She turned to leave, and something compelled her to turn round once more. The face was so remarkable, so arresting that all the new Early Christian martyr emotions faded for the space of a few seconds.

The face belonged to a girl. She might have been any age. In essentials she looked very young, nineteen or twenty, but the expression, the look of knowledge and experience, could easily have graced a woman of six or seven years older. It was just something in her eyes, green eyes—kind as they glanced at Vivian's for a second—that riveted the girl. And her hair. It stood out from her head like a halo. A halo of gold and fire. A head that would have given Rossetti the joy of his life to paint. A ray of sun shone through the window as Vivian looked at her, and lit her till she seemed aflame.

Vivian did not know why, but she knew that she would always remember this red-haired girl, this flame that she almost walked into on leaving the altar. It disturbed her—unreasonably she told herself. And as she knelt and prayed before leaving the chapel she bowed her face into her

hands, saying: "Take, O Lord, I beseech Thee, my mind from all thoughts but Thee."

. . . . . .

That evening the girls were sitting in the library used by the girls of the Upper School as a sitting-room. It was after dinner; some were reading, some doing needlework, a few writing, most of them talking. Vivian sat at the big table in the middle of the room, reading over the letter she'd just finished.

'DEAR FATHER,

'Thank you for your letter. I was very pleased to hear from you. I was Confirmed to-day, and am feeling very happy. I thought perhaps that was why you were writing to me.

'I'm so sorry Queenie has been so bad, and do hope she'll go on all right.

'Fancy the Grange having gone at last. I should like to ride again very much.

'Please forgive such a short letter as I've rather a lot of work to do. Thank you most awfully for the £3 —I think I shall buy some books.

'With love, from

'VIVIAN.

'Will let you know about the train.'

She felt it was short. She felt she should have seemed more grateful about the Easter egg. It was dreadful to think she'd almost forgotten to mention it—perhaps she'd better tear it up and start all over again, beginning by thanking him. Another day she would have written pages about Queenie, too, and about this new idea of horses. She just didn't feel like it to-day. And if Father

did think it short—and he probably would be only too thankful, anyway—he might have a twinge of conscience because he hadn't remembered what to-day really was. She put it in an envelope, addressed it, stuck it up and sighed with relief. That task over, she took out of her attaché case her diary, her most treasured possession. She wrote in it regularly—sometimes only a few lines a day, sometimes whole pages.

'*Maundy Thursday*,' she started. 'What a day it has been—I have been confirmed—it is such a wonderful feeling. First of all I shall start with this morning, though. Miss Macdonald talked to me for *simply ages* in the Den, and was quite too heavenly to me for words. I wonder why it is I feel so much easier with her than with the girls? At home I've always wished terribly for someone about my age—and here, where there are masses all round me, I feel like a fish out of water. They all get together so much and make me feel such an outsider. Perhaps it's because I came older than most of them do. Still, it'll be different now. I feel equipped with the Armour of Light, as St. John or St. Paul says. Or is it Life? I must look. Miss Macdonald has given me a very beautiful book, it's *Of the Imitation of Christ*, by Thomas à Kempis, and it belonged to her mother, and I do think it was topping of her to give it to me. It's holy, and rather like poetry, too. I shall buy some poetry with father's £3 he's given me for Easter. I wonder if I dare give Miss M. something. I would *love* to—lilies, would she mind? One does at Easter, lilies. I think I love her more than anybody in the world. But then I don't love anybody else. Father's different. He's "tweedy" and "doggy"—and doesn't talk much. How funny, father's my relation and we've never

kissed each other, and Miss M. did this morning. It was nice—same sort of feeling as when the Bishop blessed me. It felt like where in Mass it says "Filled with Thy Grace and Heavenly Benediction." Heavenly Benediction. Miss M. says I can pretend she's my mother. I shall wish she was. I wish she could marry father—still, she's too like a saint—Saint Flora. Flora Macdonald loved Bonnie Prince Charlie—my Saint Flora wouldn't love just an earthly prince. I *do* wish I could grow up good like her. And perhaps be a nun. I think that's my vocation. To be a nun—to love holy things and Mass and rosaries. And I wouldn't mind cutting off all my hair, it's pretty ugly, anyhow. But to kneel and pray in front of lots of candles, and chant, and lots of incense. Yes, that's what I shall do. . . .'

Vivian's attention was suddenly snatched from her writing. Someone was talking. "Who was it, did you say?"

"Virginia Clare; she does rather bowl you over at first. She's an old girl."

"I've never seen her before, and I've been here ages, so she must be pretty ancient."

"She's been travelling, so Mac told me the other day. Japan, and North Africa, and all over the place. She writes, you know."

"Funny name, Virginia Clare."

Vivian put down her pen and listened. She felt they were talking about that girl in chapel. She'd forgotten her, she simply must listen. Margaret Hamilton was speaking. She was a prefect, one of the more tolerant of Vivian. Most of the other girls imagined Vivian's shyness was due to a form of stand-offishness with the girls of her own age, and they discouraged any advances. The younger

girls thought she was rather a prig. Margaret had seen she was really shy and had not been hard.

"You ran into her in church, Vivian. I saw you."

"Who's that?" Vivian asked, feigning innocence for some reason. She couldn't have said why.

"An old girl called Virginia Clare. It was funny—there was Vivian looking all starry-eyed and saint-like, missing the 'bus completely and walking slap into the very pew, right into V.C."

"Oh, yes," Vivian said, "I remember now. I did do something of the sort. Silly. I'd forgotten all about it."

"Well, you stared at her long enough," another girl said. "I never saw anything like it. I nearly shouted out 'You'll know her next time,' and remembered where I was in time, and didn't. She was a great menace in her time here, I believe, wasn't she, Margaret? Sloppy crushes from all the younger kids, and all that sort of rot."

Vivian took out a book and pretended to read. Why the flaming Virginia Clare interested her so much she didn't know. Perhaps she had a face like one of the saints as painted by an old master. Yes, it must be—and her Titian red hair, too. Anyway, why should it matter? To be interested in one's fellow-beings was right. And she immediately felt she was being a prig and lying to herself. This was curiosity, not just interest.

"I was very young when Virginia was here," Margaret was speaking, "but she was a great pal of my sister's, and they were V.A.D.s together when they left. She was tremendously popular with everyone. Mac thought no end of her. She was terribly good at games, besides being so clever, too. She ought to have been head, only my sister was instead."

"She's awfully pretty, isn't she?" someone said.

"It's not exactly pretty," said Margaret. "There's just something extraordinary about her. Once you've seen her you never really forget her. There's a painting of her somewhere, called Enigma. I forget who it's by. Mac said it was very clever, but she didn't like it a bit."

A bell rang. Nine-thirty—time for bed. The girls got up, tidied the room, left one by one, talking most of them. Vivian turned idly to put her things into their case, her diary still open. She took a pen and slowly wrote in another line.

'There was a girl in chapel. Like a flame. Her name was Virginia Clare.'

. . . . . .

That night Vivian took longer than usual going to bed. She dawdled, and for a long time looked out of the window. There was a smell of new spring in the air. The stars were legion yet the night seemed black. There was no moon. She knelt to say her prayers; they were childish prayers perhaps, but very earnest. Then she read a little St. John, and finally got into bed and opened her à Kempis. She read on and on, struck by the beauty and sincerity of it.

Presently the lights all over the school were turned out. Vivian soon fell asleep. She dreamed of many things —she was living at the Grange; Miss Macdonald was painting her picture and was playing games at the same time; all the dogs were having their puppies in the chancel of the church—all wrong it seemed. She tossed about from one side of the bed to the other. A Bishop was laying his hands on her, saying: "Love watcheth, and sleeping slumbereth not." She looked into his face. It was young, with strange green eyes, and round his head a halo of flaming hair.

II

In the holidays that followed, Colonel Osborne was both surprised and delighted at Vivian's progress in horsemanship. She had an easy seat, and by the end of the four weeks was galloping over the wild Exmoor country as if she had been in the saddle all her life. She adored it, and could hardly conceal her impatience for the time ahead when she would be able to give up her time to hunting, as she determined to do. She still remained faithful to her dogs, however, and all day long during those four weeks of freedom she lived a completely outdoor life. All thoughts of school seemed to dwindle—except on Sundays, when she begged permission to drive each week to Stalton, nine miles away, to Mass. Her father and Vivian never discussed their views of religion—each respected the other's ideas.

When Vivian returned to Woodbridge she seemed to have cast off all her past shyness. Some of the other girls were astonished, but they were relieved, too. Vivian was determined to make a success of things; she told herself she owed it to Miss Macdonald, if to no one else. Her new religion still meant a great deal to her, but the first soul-shattering emotion had died down in her heart. She no longer felt it incumbent on her to take the veil, and though she said her prayers, read her Bible and her *Imitation* very carefully every evening, she did so with more interest and less ecstasy. Altogether she seemed more normal, more ordinary, and found everyone liked her better. She was good at sports, too, which helped to add popularity. She

was a good runner, and at the sports won the mile and also the high jump. Swimming she had always loved; the lake at home was where most of her childhood summers had been spent. Both at swimming and diving she became the school champion.

She quickly found herself becoming friends with everyone, though she had no 'crony' in particular. For this she was rather thankful; the girls who went about in inseparable couples bored her, they were never very popular, sneering glances followed them as a rule, and she felt a slight contempt for the secrets and whisperings that seemed to go naturally with such friendships. Vivian never felt the need of someone her own age to pour out her heart to—any trouble she had she took to Miss Macdonald, who still seemed to her the embodiment of everything wonderful.

In the summer holidays she learnt to drive the car, and this for a time almost threatened to take the place of riding. She had her seventeenth birthday in August. Colonel Osborne gave his daughter a cheque for £25 and a new hunter. Stag-hunting had started, and they both wished that she should join the hunt.

After dinner one night her father turned to Vivian and said: "How much longer do you want to stay on at this school of yours?"

Vivian hesitated.

"I don't know. I haven't thought."

"What about leavin' at Christmas? You're seventeen, and it seems senseless to me staying on for no reason. You aren't working up an exam for the University or any such rubbish, are you?"

"No," said Vivian. "And after all, if I did come back, I could hunt all the winter instead of only just in the holidays, couldn't I?"

"Certainly. And, well, I think I should like to have you at home for a bit, too. Girls nowadays rush off and get married just as you're getting to know 'em."

"Well, you needn't think I shall do anything of that sort. Married! What an awful idea."

The Colonel laughed.

"It happens to people. You'll have to get used to the idea. Not that I shall want you to. You'd probably meet a fellow with no money and want to go off with him and all that—and why, when there's this place, large enough for twenty people, and only the two of us? No, you stay round and look after the dogs, and take up hunting. And maybe I'll get you a little car of your own at Christmas. You'll be all right."

Vivian was delighted with the idea; the only sad part, she felt, would be leaving Miss Macdonald. She would hate that.

"What are the people like who've taken the Grange, Father?" she asked one day.

"Trade. Called Tyler. Made a lot of money out of pickles, or jams, or something. Believe they're all right, though. By Jove, we ought to call on 'em perhaps. I believe there's a girl about your age."

"Well," said Vivian, "if I'm coming home for good it might be a good thing."

Nothing more was said about the Tylers, however, until, a week before Vivian was going to school, they were asked to meet them at dinner.

"I've had a note from old Godshill, wants you and me to dine on Wednesday and meet the Tylers. Thought it'd be a good chance. What do you say?"

"Yes, let's. After all, as you're a widower with only me they probably didn't expect you to call on them. And if we don't like them we needn't bother about them."

"Quite," said the Colonel.

Vivian knew she was going to like Phil Tyler the moment she saw her. She looked so jolly. And she was pretty, too. Smaller than Vivian, with curly, close-cropped hair like a boy's, and the bluest eyes Vivian had ever seen. Dinner went off easily, no awkward pauses as Vivian was afraid there might be—her father was shy and generally took some time to know if he liked a man or not. He seemed to like Mr. Tyler at once; there was a fat, rollicking, Pickwickian touch about the man that one couldn't help falling for.

"Are you at school?" asked Vivian to Phil Tyler after dinner.

"No." The other laughed. "I'm twenty, you know."

"Oh, I'm—forgive me! but you do look so young."

"Yes, I'm always taken for seventeen. But I left ages ago. I was abroad—if it wasn't for an accident I had I'd be abroad now."

"Oh, bad luck—what happened?"

"I broke my wrist hunting in the New Forest in the spring. I'm studying the piano very hard, so it's filthy luck. It seems to have been a pretty bad break, because I shan't be able to play for ages yet. I've been living in Paris for a long time with my mother, but I thought this would be a good excuse to come to England."

"I've never been in France," said Vivian. "In fact, until I went to school in Surrey last year I'd hardly ever left Devonshire. What's it like, Paris?"

"Lovely, if you're working hard. My mother lives there, and I was with her, but she leads an awfully fashionable life there, and I hate her set on the whole. Fast Parisians and Americans mostly—I've no time for 'em."

"How funny," said Vivian. "Why didn't she come over for a bit, though?"

Phil Tyler looked amused. "Well—" she had a very slight drawl that was rather attractive, "I don't know that it would have been a good plan. Father and mother are divorced, you know."

"Goodness!" said Vivian, blushing furiously, "I didn't know."

"That's all right. I say, do you play any instrument?"

"Only the piano, and badly at that. I'm very keen on hunting, though." The older girl laughed.

"Forgive me, but why do you talk of them in the same breath?"

"You said you hunted, too," Vivian said simply. "I was just thinking of things we might be able to do together. You and I are the only girls within miles, you know."

Later on, when they said good night, Vivian asked Phil if she would care to come over before she went back to school.

"Oh, I'd love to," said Phil. "How sweet of you."

"I'll come over in the car and fetch you, if you like. Good-bye. I'm so glad you've come to live in these parts."

The Colonel talked volubly all the way home.

"Capital feller, capital feller," he muttered at intervals, "that Tyler. Nice girl, too, was she?"

"Yes, I liked her very much. In fact, I've asked her over."

"I suppose he's a widower," said the Colonel.

"No, they're divorced. She told me."

The Colonel looked rather nonplussed. There was a strange old-fashioned streak in him that felt things were either done or not done, and divorce fell under the last heading.

"Oh, dear. Now that's a pity. And you say you've asked the girl over . . . well, I suppose we can't help it. Still, I'm glad you told me. We mustn't allow ourselves to become too friendly."

"Why, Father, whatever does it matter really? People don't mind that sort of thing these days. It's happening all the time."

"That's no reason it should be thought of more leniently. And you're young. If you're coming out, or whatever you call it, I don't want you to be seen all over the place with a girl who has a shady mother somewhere in the background. Come to think of it, I think it's very odd telling you, a perfect stranger."

"I must admit I felt rather awkward. But don't let's be put off them, Father. After all, she is the only young person for miles, and when I come back for good I shall feel it will be nice knowing someone like that."

The following week Phil Tyler came over for the day. It was the first time Vivian had ever played hostess in her life and she felt very important. She ordered the lunch, and went over herself to fetch Phil. In the afternoon they went all over the kennels, and before tea Phil suggested a swim in the lake.

"What about your wrist?" asked Vivian.

"Well, I'm not much of a swimmer, anyway, so it won't make much difference if I go where it's shallow. And I can get into that canoe. But I'd love to see you dive."

"I wish you weren't going back to school," she said later. "And when you're back for good I shall probably be in Paris again."

"Oh, I do hope not," Vivian said.

. . . . . .

Miss Macdonald was alone in her room. Vivian knocked.

"May I come in?"

"Come in, darling. Well, what news for me to-day?" she said with a smile.

"Father wants me to leave at the end of the term."

"Oh."

There was a pause. Vivian fidgeted.

"You know how I shall hate leaving you. But after all, I shall be seventeen and a half. A whole year makes a big difference, doesn't it?"

"And what are you going to do all by yourself there?"

"Well, you see, Miss Macdonald, I shall be able to be with Father. I think he feels he'd like me as a companion. I was too young before, of course, but now it's different. Then there's the hunting, you know. And I'm going to have a car of my own for Christmas, too, which will be ripping."

Miss Macdonald felt a great wave of disappointment. Vivian's affection for her had touched her vanity. She knew it was wrong of her to feel jealous of the child's father, but she loved Vivian. He would have her for so long, he could easily spare her one more year.

"Well, my dear, of course you must do as you think best. But personally I think it's a pity. I think you're too young to leave school, really I do. One more year would not have hurt either your father or yourself to do without each other. Why, you've so often told me how little you've had in common with him." She nearly added: "And I shall miss you; I want you to stay with me a little while longer."

Vivian wrote to her father and told him that perhaps after all they had made a mistake. Miss Macdonald herself thought she was too young, and perhaps she was right. . . .

Colonel Osborne answered Vivian's letter by return. He distinctly wished it to be her last term—what the head mistress felt was nothing to him, naturally she would like Vivian to stay on, fees being the enormous sum they were. It was his private opinion that this Miss Macdonald had much too much influence on his daughter, anyway. All

this new high-falutin High Church nonsense—entirely due to the woman. No, he considered her a menace. He knew what such women could become in girls' lives, trying to keep them from home indeed—sending her out on good works next, he supposed. He saw that Vivian was raw material as yet, and ready to be moulded by anyone who took the trouble—and her fancy. He wasn't going to have his daughter at the beck and call of this blue-stockin'ed school-marm if he could help it. Better at home, under his own eye, even if she became thick with the Tyler girl she'd apparently taken such a fancy to. A divorced wife abroad somewhere was easier stuff to cope with than this domineering Macdonald bitch, as he termed her. Of course, he said very little to Vivian in his letter, only a few statements and facts.

Flora Macdonald sent for Vivian.

"I've heard from your father."

The girl turned pink; prayed that her father had not been terse or rude.

"I'm afraid he's determined that you go at Christmas, dear."

"Yes, I know."

She and the head mistress talked a long time together, and at the end of the conversation:

"I do hope, my dear, that you will not neglect your religion. I know it's going to be difficult for you, but please try to keep it up. Don't ever get careless over your prayers either. And always remember that I shall be here ready to answer any questions. Don't think because you're leaving Woodbridge you're leaving everything. You have no near women relations I know, and I want you to remember that I meant it when I said I would try to take your—your mother's place."

Vivian felt rather miserable and rather mean. She knew

the woman was fond of her, and yet, dearly as she loved Miss Macdonald, the thought of home, of hunting, the new car thrilled her most, and she knew she really wanted to leave school.

"I'm afraid you will find life rather dull, Vivian, after school, with no girls your own age," Flora Macdonald said one evening.

"Oh, but there's Phil Tyler," said Vivian, "she's frightfully nice."

"Who is she?"

"A terribly nice girl who's come to live near us at home. She's older than me—so pretty, rather like a boy—and she's keen on hunting, too. She's fearfully musical, and it's terribly sad, because in a letter I had from her the other day she tells me that because of a bad fall she had ages ago and breaking her wrist she can never go on really properly—professionally—with the piano again, so——"

"What an extraordinary girl you are, Vivian," Miss Macdonald said, rather coldly, "you distinctly tell me there's nobody your own age within miles of your home, and then suddenly let fall, just by chance, of some girl whom you've apparently made great friends with."

"I suppose I forgot. I expect you would like her. She's so clever. She's going to take up painting now as her piano can't go on. She's frightfully good at that, too."

Miss Macdonald bit her lips. She felt angry—unreasonably so. This child that she had practically mothered for nearly a year, who professed to love her so dearly, obviously was no different from any other of the girls. Couldn't even tell her when she made a new friend. She was jealous, but how horribly shocked and furious she would have been if anyone had told her.

"Does your father like this new friend of yours?" she asked one day.

"Oh, I think so. He likes her father very much. But Father's rather old-fashioned, and he isn't very keen on our knowing each other terribly well because Mr. and Mrs. Tyler are divorced."

Miss Macdonald swallowed. Things were going from bad to worse. This child was going to some devil in disguise. Divorce. . . . The thought made her shudder.

"There's nothing old-fashioned in disparaging divorce, Vivian. Don't let me hear you speak of it so lightly again. Your father is quite right, and a young girl coming into the world as early as you are doing has to be very careful when she's picking and choosing her friends. Apart from any social side to the question, there's a moral side. Does this girl ever see her mother?"

"She lives half her time with her. In Paris." Vivian felt Miss Macdonald was being unreasonable, and she was dreadfully disappointed.

"How much older than you is she?"

"She's twenty," said Vivian rather shortly, "and she doesn't look it."

"I can't help saying this, Vivian dear, but all I hear of her merely confirms what I feel, and that is, she's not a suitable girl for you to spend so much of your time with—as you will, doubtless. I disagree with friendships where there's a difference of more than a year or so in age, anyway. And a girl who has lived with a woman who has been divorced—even though it is her mother—and lives in a Bohemian set in Paris, studying art and music, as this girl seems to have done—no, I can't say I approve. However, we shall see, my dear. I wish I could have the opportunity of seeing her. I could judge in a minute if she's a nice girl."

"Of course she's a nice girl. She works too hard to be

anything else. Honestly, Miss Macdonald, I do think you're being unfair—it's not a bit like you. And I was so looking forward to having a jolly girl my own age at home to have fun with."

Flora Macdonald felt perhaps she had gone too far.

" Well, well, my dear, let's hope I'm wrong. You know I'm only too glad that you should have friends at home. But I wish," she added, " that she was really your own age. All I beg of you, dear, is that you don't listen to her ideas of easy divorce, and so on. To me it's revolting ; marriage is a sacred sacrament, and as such should be obeyed. These people nowadays who marry one day and divorce the next —why, it's an excuse, merely a social excuse for immoral behaviour. So don't go getting talked into believing it's old-fashioned and priggish to be shocked."

The night before she left Woodbridge Vivian felt so depressed that she felt she would have to come back. Everything was done for the last time. The last game of hockey had been played ; her books had been de-labelled and taken to the library for the last time ; the last dinner she would ever eat at the Abbey ; finally, the last time she would go to chapel—at any rate as a member of the school. Although Evensong was held only once a week in the chapel —on Sundays—the last evening of term was an exception always. A special blessing was said for those who were leaving, and special hymns were sung. Vivian felt herself choking in ' Fight the Good Fight,' and when the organ pealed out for the last time ' The Day Thou Gavest, Lord, is Ended ' it was more than she could stand, and she broke down completely. Why, why, why, she asked herself, had she been such a fool as to let Father persuade her to leave ? Her home would be there always, the things she was looking forward to doing—hunting, driving, going to balls perhaps with Phil—couldn't they have waited ? Of course they could.

The last night Miss Macdonald always went to say good night to all the girls who were leaving, in their rooms. She found Vivian pink-eyed, tears in her eyes and voice.

"Come, come, dearest child. This won't do at all. You must be brave." She felt she could afford to treat the matter in a lighter tone. The girl was obviously really unhappy at leaving—leaving her.

"Oh, if only I'd listened to you and stayed a bit longer."

"Come, Vivian, don't cry. That's not the way to face the future. Think of all the fun you're going to have—all the hunting and gallivanting with this new friend of yours." It was out before she could help it.

"What's she to me, or anything, beside you?" sobbed Vivian.

Flora Macdonald smiled inwardly. She felt she had won, she felt triumphant.

"You had to leave some time, dear child, and you're not saying good-bye to me for ever. Enjoy yourself with your friend." She felt she could be magnanimous, she knew she held a great deal of power over the child. "And when you've enjoyed yourself to your fill and want to settle down to something better—worldly pleasures soon pall, believe me—you tell me and I will help you to find something to do."

"And may I write often to you?" said Vivian in a quaky voice.

"Bless you, yes," laughed the head mistress. "I can't promise to answer all your letters, but you shall hear from me. I shan't forget you."

Flora Macdonald bent down and kissed Vivian. The girl threw her arms round her neck and hugged her.

"You've been kinder to me than anyone has ever been, dear darling Miss Macdonald. And I shall never, never forget you."

III

THE year that followed was a happy one for Vivian. Colonel Osborne realised that as long as he had a daughter at home it was only fair that he should make some effort to entertain her. She went with the Tylers and a party to the Hunt Ball at Combehead, which she thoroughly enjoyed. She hunted until Easter, and then, when Phil left for a few months in Paris with her mother, the Colonel asked her if she would like to do some motoring. Vivian thought this was a splendid idea, and she and her father set off for a long motoring tour in Scotland. Vivian thought that no beauty in the world could surpass the West Coast and the wild grandeur of Skye. She could not tell her father what this scenery meant to her—he would not have understood. Any inordinate enthusiasm made him feel shy, and it would have embarrassed him horribly, she knew, that anyone of his own flesh and blood could feel like weeping at a sunset, or throwing her arms round giant clumps of heather.

"If only I had your gift of painting," she said in a letter to Phil, "I would come to this country to work and never, never leave it. How you would go mad over it—we must come here together some time."

The two girls had rapidly become very great friends—Phil's more sophisticated upbringing and ideas used at first to bewilder the younger girl, but the longer she knew her the fonder she grew of her, and knew she was what Woodbridge Abbey would have called a 'good sort' and a 'sport.'

Phil was reticent about herself. She used often to talk of her life in Paris as a student, and of the sort of life her mother led there, but never of her own friends, nor of a future of her own. There never seemed a need of that intimate kind of friendship which so many girls indulge in —shared secrets, pledged vows, impulsive demonstrations. There was always plenty to talk about—they had enough in common in discussing local interests, local gossip—always plenty in the hunting season. Vivian was always interested in Phil's art. They were both great readers. In the autumn Phil wrote Vivian she was staying in London for a week before coming down to Devonshire.

"Why not come up and spend it with me? We could have great fun, and I'm in quite a cheap hotel. Do."

Vivian hardly knew London at all; she had been taken up there two or three times from school to museums and art galleries. The thought of staying there went to her head like wine.

"Yes—I don't see why not," her father said doubtfully. "After all, you're eighteen, ought to be able to look after yourself. Is Phil quite trustworthy? Won't go taking you off to odd places?"

Vivian laughed. Old Phil! From what she knew of her life in Paris, she wouldn't want to go out dancing—her father's idea of a reckless life in London.

"Do you know, Father, I've never been to a proper theatre."

"As long as you don't start going to improper ones," he said with a laugh.

"No, but seriously. Miss Macdonald took us up to hear *Hamlet* once, and *Julius Cæsar*. And I've only seen things like *Charley's Aunt* and pantomimes in Exeter. Oh, Father, please say yes!" she begged.

"All right, old girl. But see to it you don't do anything

silly. And don't get run over or anything of that sort."

"Really, Father, you forget I've driven you all over Scotland, and through towns in the Midlands, and Glasgow and places. I'm not a fool."

Phil met Vivian at Paddington when she arrived in London one evening the following week.

"Listen, we shan't be at a hotel after all. A pal of mine's lent me his flat in St. John's Wood. He's left a servant, too—it'll be much more fun."

"Oh, my dear, I can't tell you how thrilled I am! You don't realise I've never actually stayed in London before."

"Well, we shall have to have a bit of fun. Come on—it's quite near here in a taxi."

The flat was small and quite comfortable, and the servant seemed to look on Phil as her mistress already.

"D'you know, Phil," Vivian said one evening, "sometimes I wish I wasn't forced to live at Dulbridge. All this"—and she waved her hand—"is such fun. Think of living all by yourself in London."

"You always said you'd hate to live in a town," said Phil.

"I know, but then I never had done."

Three days in London had an unsettling effect on her. The shops, for instance. . . . Her father made her an allowance of £150 a year, very good for a girl living in the country as she did, without a tremendous amount of entertaining. For, of course, it was for clothes and pin-money only, he paid all her expenses, travelling, if necessary, her hunting expenses, the car. In London she rushed from Regent Street to Shaftesbury Avenue, from Knightsbridge to Oxford Street. Bond Street held her spellbound, and how often did she invent fresh excuses to look at another jumper in Fortnum & Mason's, and the latest

French novelties in a wonderful place near Park Lane. They went to films and to theatres. A new restaurant saw them every day. Soho was explored. They lunched at the 'Cheshire Cheese' with a young journalist friend of Phil's.

One morning Phil said: "Would you like to come to a party in Chelsea this evening?"

"Oh, yes, what fun! Where's that, now? But will it be very grand?"

"Hardly," said Phil, and laughed.

As parties go, the O'Neils' affair that evening was rather quiet. But to Vivian, who had never been to a Bohemian gathering of any sort, it seemed extraordinary.

"Don't leave me, for heaven's sake," she whispered, as they were ushered into a large smoke-filled studio.

"Darling——" and a young man fell upon Phil. "But where have you been all these years?"

"Hullo, Teddy," said Phil. "I'm rather a country mouse these days, my dear. You'd hardly approve! I want you to meet Vivian Osborne. Vivian, this is Teddy O'Neil, our host's brother."

"How d'you do? Have a drink—what would you like?"

"Yes, I'd love a cup of tea," said Vivian. "Thank you so much."

The young man looked startled, she thought, and then laughed.

"But, my dear, for one moment I thought you meant it!" He hurried away and returned to Vivian with a pale yellow drink.

"That is nice," she said, rather shyly.

Meanwhile, Phil seemed to be lost in a vortex of humanity at the other end of the studio. Presently she emerged, hatless, her eyes shining, with a pretty, jaded-looking woman of about forty.

"You all right, Vivian? This is Mrs. O'Neil—Vivian Osborne, who's staying with me in town until I go back to Devonshire."

"So glad to meet you, my dear," said the woman, smiling rather sadly, "but you've no drink—and not a cigarette either. Here, Desmond," she called her husband, "come and look after Miss Osborne."

A tall handsome young man leapt over a chair and was beside her.

"Here," he said, giving Vivian another cocktail. "Are you Phil's girl friend?" he asked, with a charming smile.

"Yes," said Vivian. What a jolly party, she felt. What an attractive man. What a very nice drink. "Do you know, this is the first time I've been to London, and the very first party I've been to."

"No! but this is grand. You must let us all go out one night. Let's make it to-morrow, can you?"

Vivian's eyes sparkled.

"Oh, that would be fun." Suddenly she felt funny. The room was going round. "I wonder if I could go near the window?" she said; even words seemed rather difficult. How awful if she fainted. She must keep herself steady. "I feel rather hot."

"Of course," Desmond O'Neil said. She was new to the game, he saw that very quickly, and smiled to himself as he gently piloted her across the room.

"You'll soon feel better. I expect our cocktails are a bit stronger than you generally take."

"Cocktails! Were those things cocktails? Good Lord, I must be drunk then, and that's why I'm feeling so funny." She was so concerned that she found herself telling the man.

"Take off your hat, then you'll feel better." There was an elfin attraction about Vivian. He wondered what

it was. She was tall, and he didn't as a rule admire tall women. It must be her rather small, rather sad face, with those enormous grey eyes. And how vastly she would be improved, he thought, if she cut off her hair, instead of having it in great lumps over her ears. But she was decidedly attractive. And so completely virginal. He had an insane desire to shock her. There was something prudish about the curve of her mouth. Rather odd for Phil to hang round with such a child. Perhaps.... Someone turned on the gramophone. It was 'Limehouse Blues.'

"Come and dance," and he dragged Vivian from the window. She loved dancing. She was sorry that Hunt Balls came round only once a year. But before she had been dancing with Desmond O'Neil for long she realised his was a very different form of dancing to the jovial one-steps and fox-trots that she was used to from Major Lyttleton, and young John Godshill, and the other men she met at home. This was something funny. Odd it made her feel. Could it be the cocktail still? This Desmond O'Neil was all slithery, like a snake. She knew this tune —she had heard it on the gramophone, and danced to it before, but not like this.

"Don't forget to-morrow night, will you?" he whispered into her ear. She felt his lips sweep her ear. She felt suddenly rather frightened.

"I shall have to ask Phil first, you know."

"Is she your keeper?" he laughed. There was something rather scoffing in the sound. It made her angry.

"Of course not."

"Then even if she can't come, won't you let me take you out?"

"Now, now, Desmond," came Phil's voice. Vivian realised that the tune had stopped, and that Phil was near them. "Don't you start your tricks with Vivian, she

isn't used to them. Vivian, that man's a Don Juan, so look out."

"Don't be a dog in the manger, Phil. And anyway, all I wanted is for us to have a little binge to-morrow night, just to show your girl-friend we like her."

"Oh, that'll be fine. What about Clara? Will she come too?"

"Oh, no," he said, with a laugh. "Tessa's here, staying with us. You know what that means."

"Well, try and get another man. Or, I know—I'll try and bring Jim Bird. He's not playing at the moment, and he dances divinely."

At that moment someone put on a tango. Somebody else turned out all the lights but a big Chinese lamp in a corner. No one seemed to dance, and Vivian was just going to suggest putting on a different tune, when a couple rose from a sofa and started. Vivian had never seen a tango danced before. She couldn't take her eyes off the man and woman—they seemed to melt into each other. She felt they must know each other tremendously well to dance like that. It was a very exciting sort of dance. Why, the man was actually kissing the girl, full on her mouth. At a private party, too. Well, she supposed they were professional dancers, probably a man and his wife. Fun to dance as well as that. She lay back on the sofa—what a nice thing a sofa was. Suddenly she felt someone holding her ankle . . . then her knee. . . .

"Excuse me," she whispered, "I think you've got hold of the wrong person." There was a smothered laugh. The hand disappeared, but she was aware of feeling uncomfortable. Also of feeling rather foolish. The music stopped, there was a lot of clapping, the lights were turned on again. Phil was standing in a group of people by the door.

"Darling, you were too divine! Who did actually teach you?"

And Vivian realised it had been Phil who had been dancing with such pagan abandon. She simply couldn't believe it.

"Come on, Vivian, my sweet," she called across the room. "We must go."

"But it's so early," everyone said.

"Yes, but we've another party we've got to go to. It's been such fun, but we must. Good-bye—and thank you for having us," she laughed.

"Why, where on earth are we going now?" Vivian gasped, as they got into a taxi.

"Home. But if I'd said so, ten to one one of 'em would have come back, too. And I thought you looked a bit tired. Besides, I don't want anyone, either. Most of the men were half-tight, as it was. Enjoy it?"

"Yes, I did. But I've got a perfectly beastly headache."

They were silent most of the way home. Phil lay back wondering if she could possibly prolong her stay in London. Vivian felt sick and too muddle-headed to talk.

"D'you know, I think I'm drunk," she said, as they let themselves in.

"Go and lie down, then," said Phil. "I saw you gulping down one drink after another, but I thought you looked as if you were enjoying it. I'm a cad, I ought to have warned you."

Two hours later Vivian strolled into the sitting-room. Phil was reading.

"Feeling better?" she asked.

"Yes, much." A pause, and "I say, Phil, I never knew you could dance like that."

"Did it shock you?" she asked, almost apologetically.

"No—no, of course not. But it's funny—you seemed quite different."

"I'm two people, Vivian. Sometimes it's rather worrying. You see, you only know the Dulbridge side of me and Daddy would have a fit if he knew my other."

"Which is the most you-ish, really?"

"Well—I don't know. In the country I feel grand, just to be there where everything seems so clean and jolly—and normal; I feel awfully happy there. But somehow, after a time I feel a sort of tug for this sort of life. I can't work properly in Devonshire, but here, and in Paris—even though it's mixed up with drinking and playing the fool—I don't know . . . but I know I feel a different person. Ready for anything. Country life turns me into a cabbage."

"You're exaggerating, I'm sure. You talk as if you were dull there. You know you aren't. And look how you love the hunting, too—you can't call that leading a cabbagey life."

"No, it's worse. And anyway, what right have I to lead that life even, when I know I ought to be working all the time? No—when I was studying the piano, I *knew* I could only take off occasional weeks, and go down to Daddy for a real holiday. But since that's finished with, things seem to have got different. I must have something to do, and I chose painting because I knew I wasn't so bad. But I can only work properly away from Devonshire, and yet look how slack I've been about it. Really. Except for the last few months."

Vivian sat down by the fire. Only a few embers were smouldering in the grate. She shivered.

"I think Desmond fell for you rather. He generally does for unsophisticated girls. He asked me if you were a virgin?"

Vivian flushed.

"Phil, I know you must think me frightfully stupid, but what is a virgin? I mean, I thought it was the same as

a spinster. That if you weren't married then, of course one's a virgin, isn't one?"

"Are you really as ignorant as all that?" asked Phil.

Vivian bit her lip; she felt terribly ashamed. Phil saw that she had asked the question in all earnest. She hesitated.

"A virgin's just someone who's—well, who hasn't lived with a man."

"But I have," said Vivian.

"What! You deceitful young pig! And I've been going so slowly because I thought I should shock you, and all the time——"

"But don't be stupid, Phil! You know perfectly well I've lived with Father for years and years and years and——"

"My God!" Phil got up from the chair, and her laughter rang through the room. "You really are quite perfect, darling—all I can say is the sooner I tell you a few things about life, the better."

It was very late before the two girls went to bed. Far into the night they talked. Phil was aghast at Vivian's total ignorance.

"But what I can't make out is how, with all your animals, and your dog-breeding and everything, you've remained like this. It's—it's incredible."

"Yes, it's terribly stupid," Vivian agreed. "You see, I never thought about people in the same way. I've never bothered about those sort of things. It all seemed so natural with the dogs, you know. Thank heavens you've told me, Phil! Think what a frightful gaffe I might have made." And then later, when they were in bed, she said:

"Phil, are you awake? I say, I do think it was rather awful of Mr. O'Neil to ask that about me. You did say I was, didn't you?"

"Yes," yawned Phil, "of course, silly. Don't you worry; he won't try and rape you with me here."

Vivian turned pale. Really, the number of awful new words and awful new things she was learning. And the dreadful thing was that she couldn't help thinking about it.

"Phil—you're one, aren't you?"

"What?" said Phil, from under the bed-clothes.

"A virgin?" whispered Vivian.

"Well—since you ask me, I'm not. But don't go yelling it all over Devonshire."

"But, Phil, how ghastly—how ghastly if you had a baby. Somebody in the village did once. I never knew what all the fuss was about. I see now."

"Don't you worry about me, my dear. And honestly, I do think we'd better go to sleep. It's terribly late, and don't forget you drank a lot this evening, and you'll want to feel fit to-morrow."

"I'm not sure I want to go."

"Oh, hell! Don't be such a goose. Why ever not? I'll see nobody gets fresh. Damn it all, Vivian, you must start some time to go out with people who might conceivably want to kiss you. Or do you bar that, too?"

"Oh, really, Phil. I've never kissed anyone in my life. Must I? I'm quite all right as I am. It's a fact I've only kissed Miss Macdonald."

"Then it's high time you started in with somebody else. You really are absurd, Vivian. You don't think it's wrong, do you?"

"No, no—no, I promise you I don't. It's just that falling in love just doesn't give me the least thrill. Why, even in books it doesn't. I've always loved historical books, and memoirs—and—and Jorrocks—and well, you know, I just have always been rather bored by love."

"Well," said Phil, "I'm going to sleep now. And all I

can say is, I hope to God you alter your opinions sooner or later—the sooner the better, or life's going to be damn dull for you!"

. . . . . .

"I think I shall stay at home this afternoon," said Vivian next day. "After all, we shall be late to-night, you say, and we've been rushing about quite a lot. You haven't got a book you can lend me, have you?"

"Have you read any Lawrence? I suppose not. Considering one thing and another, I think I shall leave you with this."

"*Women In Love*," Vivian read out, as she caught the copy Phil chucked across the room. "Shall I like it, I wonder? I suppose you think I need initiating in such things," she said, with a laugh.

In the evening, when Phil returned, the flat was empty. About seven o'clock Vivian came in.

"Look," she said, as she swept off her hat, "I've had all my hair cut off; d'you like it?"

Phil gasped.

"Good God! but it does make a difference. I love it! But you've no idea how far prettier you look. What on earth made you do it, and what on earth will your father say?"

"Um. . . . D'you know, I haven't thought?"

"Is this the result of reading your first D. H. Lawrence, or what?"

"Well, d'you know, in a way it is. I've never read such a book, and about tea-time I got up and said to myself, I *must* do something. And I couldn't think of anything to do, and suddenly I thought, well I'll have my hair cut off. I'm glad you like it."

At that minute the telephone rang. Phil answered it.

"Hullo. . . . Is that you, Desmond? Yes. . . . Oh. . . . Well, I'll try Jim . . . yes. . . . She's cut off all her hair as the result of being left alone with D. H. Lawrence all the afternoon. What? . . . I'll ask her. . . ."

She turned to Vivian with a giggle. "He says he hopes that's all that's been cut." She turned to the mouthpiece once more. "*Elle ne comprend pas, mon ami.* . . . All right . . . eight-thirty. . . ."

She put down the telephone.

"He says I must find another man. You'll like Jim—he's very good-looking and doesn't talk shop. He's an actor, you know. Made a success in *Jermyn Street* with Rose Atherley."

"What fun!" said Vivian. "I've never seen an actor off the stage."

"I do love you, Vivian. You seem to get so excited about such ordinary things. I wish I could."

"I expect it's because they're not ordinary to me. I'm going to have a bath." In her bedroom she heard Phil go to the telephone. "I want Museum 91001. Hello, can I speak to Mr. Bird? . . . Not in? . . . Oh, dear. . . . Yes, who's that? . . . GUY . . . but . . ." The door banged and Vivian heard no more.

At about twenty minutes past eight the front door bell rang.

"Go and open the door," Phil shouted, "I expect it's Desmond and I'm not ready."

"Hullo, Mr. O'Neil. Please come in." Vivian led the way to the sitting-room. "Phil's produced some drinks from somewhere, I see. Have one?"

"You're more of an elf than ever with your hair like that. Come here and let me have a look at you." He was standing by the empty fireplace. Quickly he ran his fingers up the back of her neck and through her hair. "D'you like that?"

Vivian wriggled. "Funny . . . yes, I do," she laughed. "Nice for Phil to have this flat whenever she wants it. Do you know Arthur Doring?"

"The man it belongs to? No." Vivian lit a cigarette, a habit learnt during her stay. "But she can't always have it. I mean, he's here too sometimes."

"What's that matter? They always share it if they're both here."

"Are you sure?" asked Vivian, trying not to look surprised.

"Oh, Lord, have I dropped a brick? . . . Yes, fancy your not knowing. Nice lad, Arthur, mad about Phil. She tells me he's not her lover, however. Not that she ever lets you know about her affairs, really. Does she?"

At that minute Phil came into the room. She had on a simple black frock and a beautiful red Spanish shawl. Large gold gipsy ear-rings fell from her ears. She looked very young and rather boyish as she stood in the doorway, her blue eyes lit with half-veiled excitement, and her dark, cropped curly head.

"Guess who's coming to-night instead of Jim, Desmond? Guy. . . ."

"God bless my soul! I didn't know that was still on?"

"I haven't seen him for eighteen months. I rang up Jim, he was away, Guy answered. Well, here's to luck!" and she took up a cocktail, draining it. "I think that's him." There was a rat-tat on the door. "Go and let him in, Desmond."

"Who is this Guy, Phil?" Vivian asked.

"Guy Bird, Jim's brother. . . . I used to be terribly in love with him. In fact he's the only man I've ever really loved," she said slowly.

The two men came into the room. Guy Bird was a tall, fair, good-looking man about thirty-seven. His steel-blue

eyes and extremely fair hair made people mistake him frequently for a Scandinavian. He looked the type of man who would spend his time hunting big game, or exploring the wildest jungles of the Amazon. He was, in fact, a writer—not of novels, but he'd published several books on travel, a treatise on South American birds, and a Life of Burton. Vivian saw at once how attractive he was, but noticed a cruel set about his jaw, and a thin mouth.

"My dear, this is fun." He went to Phil with both arms outstretched. "I didn't know you were in London. True, I've been here only a week myself, but I'm off to Italy next week. Come with me?"

"Not this time," laughed Phil, but Vivian noticed she looked disturbed, uncomfortable.

"Shall we go?" said Desmond.

Dinner was a riotous affair at a small, *chic* French restaurant off Soho Square, noted for its wines. Phil had never been more amusing, so Vivian thought, and as both the men seemed friendly and really to like her, Vivian's own shyness soon wore off completely. Later they went on and danced at Ciro's, where Bird was a member, and when that closed they went to 'The Green Staircase,' which was a rather notorious night-club. Desmond said Vivian must visit one before she left for home.

She only danced twice with Guy Bird; it was evident from the beginning of the evening that there was something between him and Phil. Vivian did not mind. Desmond O'Neil was obviously very attracted by her, she in her turn by him. His rather slow, intimate way of dancing, sudden squeezes of the hand at particular bits in tunes, the way in which he whispered rather naughty things to her—all the tricks, in fact, by which most Lotharios ply their trade, and are taken for what they are worth by the knowing, but which were all utterly new and thrilling to Vivian.

"Let me take you home to-night, won't you?"

"Surely Phil would think it rather odd—and obvious," objected Vivian, excited by the thought as she was.

"No—of course not. She'll be relieved, as she'll want to go with Guy."

They returned to the table.

"Your friend Vivian is tired. I'm going to take her home."

Phil followed her to the cloakroom. "Listen. If I'm late—much later, I mean—don't stay awake for me." There was something in her eyes that prevented Vivian from asking her any more questions.

For about five minutes after they had got into the taxi they discussed the evening, the merits of the various restaurants, the bands. Everything seemed rather constrained. Suddenly Vivian felt O'Neil's arm go round her. There was a pause.

"Why are we wasting our time?" he said quietly. Vivian swallowed.

"I've wanted to kiss you for about six hours." Vivian moved to the corner of the seat.

"Funny little thing you are, aren't you? What are you afraid of?" He slipped one arm round her, his other hand wandering.

"Please don't do that."

"Why not? I shan't hurt you."

"Oh . . . really, Mr. O'Neil. . . ." What on earth did he think he was doing? Surely he couldn't imagine she was enjoying this drive back? "You know . . . can't . . . I mean. . . . Well, I don't like it."

"Hasn't anyone ever made love to you?"

"No," said Vivian. Oh dear, how much farther? Her heart dropped as she saw they were entering Regent's Park.

"Let me teach you, you funny little thing, you." He bent over and tried to kiss her. She quietly turned her face away. Oh, what a horrible man, she felt. And it was all being so different from the stories Phil had told her, and the glamour of Lawrence's book.

"Turn round." Obediently she faced him. Perhaps, after all, if she let him kiss her it would quieten him, she thought. And they must be nearly there.

"I'm going to kiss you properly before you get home, if it means a fight." Damn it all, she couldn't be so green as she pretended. She had jumped at the idea of his taking her home, really. Why did girls always lead you up the path, he asked himself. This kid wasn't going to be allowed to, anyway.

"What d'you want?" asked Vivian.

"You——"

"Well, here I am. Only please——" Before she finished her sentence O'Neil had fastened his lips on hers. He kissed her brutally, savagely—making his crude love to her all the while. Presently the taxi drew up to the house and stopped. Vivian was silent. She was deadly pale.

"I say, are you all right?" The colour she had gone, the still, funny way she was sitting, frightened him. Suddenly she drew her coat round her and started. She spoke in a quiet, almost dead voice.

"Oh, we're here, are we? Will you light a match so that I can find my key? Thank you. . . ."

Without another word she turned her back, ran up the steps and let herself in the front door, banging it in the face of the man who had followed her. He waited a minute, then shrugging his shoulders walked lightly down the steps, got into the waiting taxi and drove off.

Once inside the sitting-room Vivian's nerves seemed to go to pieces. It was almost as if an ague had seized her.

"Oh, God . . . Oh, God . . ." and she walked round and round the room. It had seemed a nightmare. Presently she went into her room and began to undress. Never, never, never again would she even speak to a man, she said. If this was what happened . . .

Lying in bed, tossing from side to side, she could not manage to sleep. She could still feel his hot horrible kisses on her mouth, his hungry hands exploring her body. Why didn't Phil come? About half-past four she heard the front door open softly . . . steps . . . and the door of Phil's room close. She leapt out of bed. Surely she must be wrong, but wasn't that the sound of a key turning in Phil's room? She opened the door and listened. Voices —Phil's voice and a man's. Guy Bird's. Sick at heart Vivian returned to her room. Six o'clock struck before she at last fell asleep.

Late next morning she woke to see Phil standing at the foot of her bed. She looked terribly tired, Vivian thought.

"Let's go back to-day, Phil."

"Why, what's happened?" Phil spoke quickly. Slowly, falteringly, Vivian told her.

"What a beast that man is! Darling, I'm terribly sorry. I never thought. . . . What a brute I was to let you go off alone, but I swear I didn't think he'd behave like that."

"Oh, well, never mind now," said Vivian in a dull voice. "Perhaps it's just as well. One lives and learns, doesn't one?" and she laughed hardly. "By the way, I heard you come in."

Phil looked at her quickly.

"Yes——" and Vivian turned to the window.

"Oh!" There was a pause.

"Of course, if you want to go back I quite understand.

But I'm afraid I shan't be able to come down till next week."

Vivian looked surprised. Phil grew uncomfortable.

"I want to be in town with Guy till he goes to Italy. Oh, I know I make myself pretty damn cheap with him, and he only looks on me as a glorified tart, but I can't help it. I adore him, I always shall."

"Why don't you marry him, then?"

Phil laughed.

"Marry Guy? I'd like to see someone suggest it! As a matter of fact I believe he's married. No, it's mistress or nothing with him. And I'm fool enough to let him trample on me, damn his eyes!"

Vivian shut her eyes. It all seemed so ugly, so sordid. She was aware, too, of feeling disappointed in Phil.

"Don't look like that, Vivian," said Phil. "Perhaps you'll feel like it yourself one day."

"Never—never," Vivian cried.

Late in the afternoon, her packing finished, and having said a somewhat embarrassed farewell to Phil, Vivian caught the 3.30 for Dulbridge.

IV

Strange, really, that—comparatively speaking—so small an episode can change a person's outlook on life. Nowadays there are few girls who reach the age of twenty in practically the same state of innocence in which they are born. But Vivian was one of the exceptions. Even at school she held aloof from the curious whisperings that other girls indulged in. Such bare facts of life as she learnt from the animals around her had been her only source of knowledge. And somehow she had failed to catch the connection, as it were, between animals and human beings. Phil had really only explained the essentials, and it was the realisation of lesser things, coming quickly as they had, that shook Vivian's foundations.

Outsiders did not notice any difference. To her father she had always been reserved. He did not think it strange that he had to drag from her any little thing or place of interest she had seen in London. And he liked her short hair—said she looked more like the son he ought to have had. During the winter she hunted more than ever, four times a week to the previous season's twice and three times. She looked out for Phil with apprehension, and was even relieved when the other girl failed to turn up at meets. Was she ashamed? she asked herself. She tried not to think unkindly of Phil—after all, she was her one friend. Who was she to blame somebody else for following the dictates of her heart, because they were different from

her own? It was not so much that she felt in any way outraged by Phil's behaviour as that she felt herself deceived, cheated. Phil had been her friend, and had withheld, almost deliberately it seemed, that side of her which could not help but startle Vivian.

"I don't seem to have heard you ring up Phil Tyler lately," said Colonel Osborne one evening. "Isn't she down here? I thought the two of you came back together."

"No—I told you, Father—Phil decided to stay on a bit longer."

"When is she coming back?"

"I—don't know." There was a pause.

"Haven't quarrelled or anything, have you?"

"No, no, of course not." Vivian spoke quickly, too quickly. But her father, noticing she seemed awkward about the whole subject, dropped it.

The next morning Vivian had a short note from Phil, sent from Paris.

'VIVIAN DEAR,' it ran,

'I suppose you still blame me for what happened in town. Well, I said I was sorry. Forgive me for not writing before, but life has been one hectic rush. This is just to let you know I'm off to Italy. Guy is going to Capri—he's got some sort of a place there—and I'm going with him. I feel I shall be able to work there; after all, he's the one thing that makes life important for me, and I shall never do anything decent at home, just pottering about and thinking of him. I've told Mother—she says I must lead my own life. Thank God for one enlightened mind! Daddy will fancy I'm alode, or with another girl. Don't tell him as, after all, he's rather a darling, and it would only hurt him.

Please forgive me for any unhappiness I've caused you and try to understand.

'Yours ever,

'PHIL.'

"I wish I could understand how people feel about these things," Vivian thought. "How can they call all this mucking about love. I thought love was just devotion, and wanting to be with a person. But all this funny business . . ."

"I've had a letter from Phil," she said at breakfast. "She's gone to Italy to study. Her painting, you know."

Her father nodded, and went on with *The Times*. He wasn't very interested in the doings of Phil Tyler, he had never trusted her very much, and now he was glad that Vivian would not be seeing too much of her. She was a Modern, he felt sure. And he did not like Moderns, least of all the girls. Still, it would have been selfish to deprive Vivian of the only girl of her generation within miles. However, he told himself, all's well that ends well, and buttering a piece of toast and marmalade he turned to the day's Leader.

Vivian was popular with the hunting crowd. Especially with the men, oddly enough. Her shyness, her aloofness appealed to them. Her manners were so much nicer, much kinder than the other women's. She was a first-rate sportswoman, too, and completely fearless. There was no conceit about her either. She always had a ready smile for everyone.

Since her return from London Vivian read a great deal. Fiction, for the most part. Everything she could lay her hands upon. But every novel had the same theme—sex. At first she told herself not to worry—she had been right, or at any rate natural, to feel as she did. It was Phil, and

Phil's queer set of friends, that behaved in that horribly exaggerated manner. And she read to relieve herself. But she got no relief from the books she read. All the men seemed the same. All the women took their love—if love this really was—as a matter of course. Everyone seemed obsessed by this one thing—sex. And what was it they wanted of each other? she asked herself time after time. Not love, as she understood it, but just pleasure in each other's bodies.

V

The following spring Colonel Osborne died. He was thrown one day when hunting, and though the fall was not very serious, pneumonia set in and he was dead in a week. Barely twenty-one, Vivian found herself an orphan, with a settled income of about £3000 a year, and Dulbridge. Her father's death came more as a shock than a sorrow. He had seemed so much part of her life, the background of things. She had taken him for granted, as one takes the walls of one's house. The idea of remaining alone in the big barrack of a place depressed her, fond of it as she was. Then, when the chance of a good let came, she took it—for an indefinite period.

People were very kind to her, and though she appreciated their kindness, the pity behind it seemed to jar upon her nerves. She felt that, for the time being at any rate, she would leave the south.

It happened that she had to go up to London one day—the solicitor wished to see her on some important matter. During the afternoon she felt tired and went into a shop in Regent Street for some tea. As she was waiting, she heard her name spoken. Looking up, Vivian saw Miss Macdonald.

"My dear child," the woman exclaimed, "I thought it was you, but it's such ages since I saw you I couldn't be certain."

"But how lovely to see you! Do sit down here and have some tea. What are you doing up in town?"

"I've been to the dentist, and been doing some shopping. You know how rarely I get away from school in term time. And how are you, my dear? I was so distressed about your father. I hope, Vivian dear, you're not taking it too hardly. After all, it comes to us all some time or another, and I always think it's such a dreadful thing when I hear people blaming our Lord, and throwing away their faith when any trouble comes to them."

"Oh, I'm all right, Miss Macdonald. Of course it was a shock—I told you when I wrote to you. But it would be silly, I think, to get bitter about it. I've been up to-day to see Mr. Evans, our family solicitor, about one or two things. I've decided to let the house, you know."

"And what are you going to do, Vivian?"

"Well—I don't know. I've got quite a lot of money to live on, and by letting Dulbridge I shall be spared all the bother of keeping that up, for a time at any rate. I shall travel for a bit, and then I shall either take a flat in town or, better, join a good club and take a cottage somewhere not too far away, on the river probably."

"But you can't live alone. And certainly you can't travel alone."

"No, I suppose not. Something will turn up, I expect."

"My dear, I do think you're so good, so brave."

Vivian wondered why people always saw one in a bright light or else none at all. Never a medium one. Here she was told she was being brave because she was merely taking life as it came and not making a fuss. Yet if she had been bitter or unhappy Miss Macdonald would have blamed her. Funny it all was.

"I suppose you wouldn't care to come to Scotland later on?" Vivian spoke shyly. "I went there with Father, and loved it. I shall motor myself up there. To

Skye, probably. It would be ripping if you could come for a bit."

Flora Macdonald hesitated. "My dear, d'you think you really would care for an old woman like myself? Haven't you any friends of your own age? I should love to come, but——"

"How absurd you are," Vivian interrupted. "I'd rather you came than anyone. You know that. Don't you remember, too, you said you'd be my mother? I certainly feel now more than ever that——"

"My dear, it's very sweet of you. I'll come with the greatest pleasure. I've one or two visits to make in the holidays, to Bath, and to Harrogate, and I must spend a few days with my sister at Harrow. But you tell me when you're going north and I'll fix up my plans."

So it was settled, and Vivian and Flora Macdonald motored up to Scotland early in August. Vivian stayed a couple of days in London, at Brown's Hotel, and picked up Flora Macdonald from Harrow. She had a somewhat embarrassing moment when the question of finance cropped up, but after several hours, off and on, of arguing along the Great North Road, Miss Macdonald gave in.

"You're a dear generous child, Vivian," she said, trying not to show relief in her voice.

The month went by quickly; the elderly woman and the girl were good companions to each other. For the last year, certainly since her London visit with Phil, Vivian had felt herself growing away from the ideals she had held when she first left school. True, her religion had not left her, though perhaps that was due more to the glamour of the Anglo-Catholic services and the churches she went to than to the actual faith itself. But a restlessness and disquiet had been growing in her soul, and the calm and apparent sincerity of Flora Macdonald helped her once

more. There was something in the simple generosity and rather grave wisdom in the girl that helped the other woman, too—and Vivian's devotion to her certainly needed no questioning.

"I shall hate it when this is all over," said Vivian one evening. "We've had such fun, haven't we? and it's all so glorious, the places . . . everywhere. . . ."

"Ah, well, good things can't last for ever. It would be bad for us if they did."

"Do you *ever* grumble, Miss Mac darling? Don't you ever think 'Oh damn' about things?"

"I try not to. All the little things that come to worry me, I generally feel how small they are compared to other people's."

"You are wonderful," Vivian mused. "Tell me, what have you enjoyed best up here?"

"I've loved it all, dear child. All the motoring and the interesting places we've seen together. And I've loved being able to do my sketching, poor attempts as they are. And I've loved being with you, my dear child. You're at great companion for your years, you know. So understanding."

Vivian's heart warmed.

"I love to hear you say that. Anyway, this has been the happiest time I've ever had."

"And don't let yourself slip away from me again, Vivian."

"No, I won't. It wasn't that I didn't want to write, you know. I felt you'd be bored—and, I don't know,well I just got like that, you know."

"And go on with your Masses and your confessions, won't you?"

"I haven't been to confession since I left school." There was a pause.

"I'm sorry about that. Why not, dear child?"

"I don't think I care for the priest at home."

"That's not a very good excuse. After all, it's God you're confessing to, really, and——"

"Exactly—that's why I feel I can do just as well by myself, in my prayers."

"I see. Well, I think it's a pity, but of course . . ."

One day a couple arrived at the inn, on their honeymoon. Vivian felt excited for them, the bride was so pretty and the young man so very kind—charming, too.

"Well, Vivian, I suppose the day will come when you'll be a happy bride too."

"I shan't ever marry." Vivian flushed. "I hate men—in that way."

"How refreshing," Flora Macdonald said. "Most girls of your age only think about their wedding day, and what it's like to be in love. But then, you are so unusual, dear."

"I love to see people looking pretty and happy like that girl over there. I only wish I could. I know I never shall."

"Well, well, you're very young yet, Vivian; you've only come across a few men at dances, your father's friends. There's no reason for you to imagine you'll never marry because you've not yet met a man for whom you care. All the same, far be it from me to think that marriage is the Be All and End All of woman's existence. I call that nonsense. There are many callings, marriage is one."

"Have you," Vivian started timidly, "ever been engaged, Miss Mac?"

"No," said Flora Macdonald. "No. The idea of marriage has always been repugnant to me." She shivered.

"There you are, you see. That's how I feel about it."

"Why," said Miss Macdonald, warming to the subject,

"the idea of a man kissing me. . . ." Vivian, trying not to be disloyal, wondered if many men had tried. Somehow she couldn't imagine there had been very many attempts on the gaunt, soldier-like Flora.

"I think it's horrid, too," said Vivian.

"What!" and the woman sat up. "Have you been kissed by a man? You've never told me this."

"Oh, well—it happened some time ago. I'd begun to forget."

"Go on, go on." The girl didn't notice the look of curiosity in Flora Macdonald's face that made her eyes look like beads. Vivian started to tell her story. About half way through she stopped.

"You can't like hearing it. It'll only disgust you and make you hate me."

"Of course it won't. But I ought to know about it. Go on." All the starved sex of the woman seemed to start in her body and reveal itself in her eyes as she listened, breathless, to the end of Vivian's rather sordid little tale. At the end she shuddered.

"You poor child! Oh, the whole thing is so horrible."

"I wonder why there are so many books then, Miss Mac, that talk about it all quite plainly and openly?"

"Filthy books, that's all."

That night, as they went to bed, Flora Macdonald kissed the girl good night, and just as she was leaving the room said:

"Oh, Vivian—I've just finished my book. I wonder if you've anything you could lend me?"

. . . . . .

"What's happened to that friend of yours, that girl?" Flora Macdonald asked Vivian one day.

"Do you mean Phil Tyler? It was with her I was

staying in London that time. The time I told you about—you know."

"I'm not surprised. And where is she now? You never speak about her."

"She's living abroad. She paints, you know."

"Perhaps I've sometimes been rather hard on her—it's difficult if one judges people only by what one hears. Tell me, though, is she a—nice girl?"

"Nice? Nice is such an inadequate adjective, don't you think? I used to be very fond of her, but after the London business I don't know exactly what happened, I was very silly about it. But somehow it cut us off from each other. She went to Italy directly after, and occasionally I get postcards from her, that's all."

"I don't think you behaved in a silly way at all. It was only natural a girl like you should have been shocked."

"It was more of a shock itself than actually a case of being shocked, you know."

"You still haven't answered my question."

Vivian laughed.

"Well, what do you really mean?"

"Is she a Christian?"

"Oh, yes, I've never heard there was any Jewish blood in her."

"I don't mean that. Is she a practising Catholic; does she go to church, does——?"

"Well, no. At least, I've never heard her talk about it. I don't think she's religious. And then perhaps her father and mother being divorced have made things difficult for her. What d'you think?"

"Poor child," said Miss Macdonald. "Is she a—good girl?"

"Good?" Vivian felt uncomfortable.

"Men, for instance. Is she fast, I mean?"

"I don't think she's really what you call promiscuous. She's gone away to Italy with someone, but he won't marry her. But she's awfully in love with him. It's sad, isn't it?"

"My dear, I'm only too thankful you have stopped being so intimate with her. There's nothing like contact for contaminating the very best of us. I think it's terrible, a girl very little older than you, living in sin with a man. Horrible, degrading."

That evening Vivian puzzled about things as she lay in bed. About life, about this sex business. About Phil and girls like Phil. And about Miss Macdonald. Herself, too. She never held any brief for herself. She rather despised herself for feeling as she did about what was apparently natural and normal in life. It was just unfortunate for her, stamped her in her own mind as being rather apart from other people, certainly from other young people. Miss Macdonald, now, she, it appeared, felt the same. But should she? What she had really wanted from the older woman was a friendly pat on the back and a cheery word about things being natural, and not to be ridiculous about it. But the pat and the cheery word had not been forthcoming. Only an almost morbid curiosity, fed by horror. And then Vivian wondered whether Miss Macdonald, with all her religious fervour, was really as charitable, as kind, as understanding as she used to think her? People talked of being broad-minded. It was a trait that the girl felt was terribly necessary. It was something she lacked herself at times. What was going to happen if she found flaws in Miss Macdonald? Her attitude to Phil, for instance, and also her attitude to people of a different religious way of thinking? There was something bigoted about it all. And Vivian fell asleep with just the tiniest feeling of misgiving in her heart.

. . . . . .

In the autumn Vivian met a young man called Robin Masters. He was quite attractive and seemed to like Vivian. He adopted a brotherly attitude to her, which she found comforting and assuring. His mania was cars, and before they had known each other two months he had persuaded Vivian to sell the old Napier and her own small car, and get a big super-Renault. Vivian was a good driver, with no nerves. Robin was reckless, and, determined not to be outdone by him, she became reckless, too. In the November she bet him she would race him to Edinburgh. At midnight they started, Vivian alone in her Renault, Robin Masters in his new Sunbeam. Robin drew up outside the Caledonian at one-thirty the next day, only to find Vivian waiting on the step—having arrived an hour earlier.

"By Jove, you're a marvel, Vivian!" the boy said, with admiration ringing in his voice. "What shall we do now we are here?"

"I don't mind admitting I feel whacked," said Vivian, "and anyway this is my favourite town, so I shall stay for a bit."

"All by yourself?"

"Can't you, too? Do—it'd be such fun."

"My dear old girl. . . . I think it would be thought rather odd, what?"

"Can't we pretend we're relations, or something?" asked Vivian.

"That's just what they'll think anyway," said Robin.

"No, seriously though, Robin. But perhaps you'd rather be off again?"

"Jove, no. It's not often we get a chance like this to be together," which Vivian thought was charming and brotherly of him.

So finally Vivian stayed at the Caledonian and Robin

moved to another hotel, and they explored every nook and cranny of the place, and hated it when they had to leave.

"My mother wants you to come to the South of France with us, Vivian," said Robin on Christmas Day. Vivian was dining with the Masters.

"How I should adore it—I've never been abroad."

"We've got a villa at Beaulieu. Will you come?"

"Couldn't we motor out?" suggested Vivian, a week later.

"Yes, I don't see why not. All of us, though. Because the Mater, sweet as she is, wouldn't think it 'quite nice' if we went gallivanting off together."

"But I don't mind going by myself."

"You would at this time of year. It'll be difficult going, anyway, and you don't know the country."

Mrs. Masters, however, decided against the trip, and in the end the two 'children,' as she called them, were allowed to motor out, chaperoned by Robin's uncle, an elderly parson, who was going to act as chaplain in Monte Carlo for the season.

Vivian was enthralled with the beauty of the place; the mountains, the sun, the deepness of the blue of the sea. She played golf at Mont Agel, she entered with Robin in the various tennis tournaments. Sometimes in the mornings she would get up early and drive to Nice to see the flower market in its full glory. Once they took a boat to the Isles de Lerins, and had to stop the night because a storm started and it was too rough to go back in their boat, and they had missed the steamer. She went to the Opera and the Ballets, she played roulette in the Kitchen, and one evening won £20 in the Sporting Club. They danced, they rode, they motored. For two months life slipped by in careless and joyful fashion.

One evening Vivian lay on the veranda, reading. She

heard Mrs. Masters' voice from the balcony above, calling for Robin. She did not mean to listen, but it was close, their voices easily audible.

"But I think it's expected of you, dear boy," she heard the woman say. "After all, you're a bachelor, eligible, she's a dear girl, one I'd be more than pleased to have as a daughter. And I think to ask a girl out here for two months, to live in her pocket more or less and not even *ask* her to marry you, is rude, is insulting, is . . . well, I can't make you young people out nowadays. You tell me you're fond of her."

"But, Mother, for God's sake listen!"

Vivian's mouth was dry. This was all too awful. She daren't get up and walk away, they would think she was listening on purpose. She couldn't cough. . . .

"It's because I am so damn fond of her that I couldn't. It's like having a really good sister having Vivian—why, I couldn't make love to her, it would seem indecent."

"Dear old Robin," thought Vivian.

"You don't know that she feels the same, Robin. If I were her I should be thinking how slow you were coming to the scratch."

"I'm sure she feels no such thing," said Robin, hotly.

"Well, it makes it all very awkward for me," Mrs. Masters said, in a tired voice, "and whether you're in love with her or not, you've paid enough attention to her to make it your duty to ask her, at all events."

That evening Vivian wondered how she would get through dinner—they were all rather silent. It seemed as if there was a shadow between them, something that held them all from being natural. Mrs. Masters pleaded a headache and went to bed early. She kissed the girl affectionately good night, and Vivian saw her give a piercing look at Robin as she left the room. Robin poured himself out

another brandy, and pulled at his collar. Vivian laughed nervously.

"You're drinking a lot to-night. That's your second since we came out of the dining-room."

"Vivian-will-you-marry-me?" Robin blurted out. Vivian felt like laughing, he reminded her of a little boy owning up to some piece of mischief.

"No, Robin." She could see his relief was enormous.

"Robin, if I tell you a secret, swear you won't give me away—and don't hate me, either." He nodded. "I heard your mother talking about this, this evening. I couldn't help overhearing." Robin looked aghast. "You needn't look so worried, Robin. I think it's a far greater compliment that you really prefer me as a sister. And you see I should have been frightfully embarrassed if you had been in love with me, because I am so fond of you—like you are of me—and I should have hated it. I don't want to marry anyone."

"Why not?"

"Oh, I don't know," said Vivian, rather vaguely, "but I can't imagine that I shall ever fall in love with anybody. Do you think you will?"

"Oh, yes, Vivian. And that's why . . . well . . ." He looked embarrassed.

"Go on."

"Supposing you had said you would marry me, and everything had gone on all right, for a year or two perhaps. Our marriage would have been built on our friendship really—and that's not enough—for a man, at any rate. I should probably meet some other woman that, well . . . and God, what a swine I should feel if I'd hurt you."

"As it is, everything's cleared up finely," said Vivian. "Thank goodness I heard your mother, Robin."

. . . . . .

"Vivian," said a voice. Vivian was standing on the terrace below the Casino looking at the sea. She started and looked round quickly.

"Why—Phil——"

"Yes, it's me. I've been in Monte Carlo for a week. I thought I saw you leaving the Sporting Club the other evening, and then I felt I must be wrong. What are you doing out here? Come and have a drink and let's hear all your news."

Phil led the way and they found a table outside the café. Over aperitifs and cigarettes Vivian told her about her father's death, how she had let Dulbridge, the flat in London, Robin. . . .

"And now it's your turn," she said.

"How d'you think I look, Vivian?" Phil asked. She spoke disinterestedly, but there was a hard tone in her voice. And Vivian noticed for the first time that she looked older. Her eyes looked weary, Vivian thought, and there was a sagging about her mouth that had never been there before. And these hard, rather masculine clothes. On Phil, who had always been so extravagant where pretty things were concerned. Yet there was certainly nothing poverty-stricken about her. She had on a thin tweed coat and skirt, tailored like a man's, a blue polo sweater, high at the neck, a small felt hat. Vivian noticed her hands. They were restless, stained brown by nicotine. Rather highly polished nails, too, that seemed to show up at a disadvantage the black onyx ring she wore on her little finger.

"Well," said Phil, "I know you're thinking I look forty, and a fright. It's rather sad to think I'm twenty-five—at least, I think I am. I've rather forgotten."

"Where are you staying?" Vivian asked.

"The Hôtel de Paris—with a friend."

"Guy?" Vivian had to ask.

"No, not Guy, my dear. That's all over." She spoke very hardly, lighting another cigarette.

"I'm sorry, Phil. Tell me what's been happening to you—unless, of course, you'd rather not."

"Oh, I don't mind. I knew it couldn't last, of course. We travelled about all over the place to start with. Rome, Florence, back to Paris, Algiers. We went to Spain for a time—I had a miscarriage there, and nearly died. That infuriated Guy. Then he sold his new book very well, and that made him better. He left me in Paris and went somewhere—I don't know where—for two months. I knew I was a damn fool to stand for it all. Mother saw me in Paris, she was quite good to me, but I could see both I and my troubles bored her. Once I went to London for a week-end. Father was up. He was marvellous to me, but, of course, he didn't know what sort of a mess I was making of things, and I couldn't face telling him. After that Guy came back to Paris and picked me up, and we both went to Capri—he has a place there. Everything went wrong there. God, what a bloody, damnable place!"

"I thought it was so lovely."

"Yes. It is. It should be about the most perfect place in the world. By this time things were hopeless, and I suppose that's why I loathe it. I think it infuriated me still more because it was such a divine place, and I knew what heaven it could have been."

"What sort of hopelessness was it—other women?"

"No—not till the very end. At least, that's not true. There were women, but it was only their bodies. He's mad. You see the worst thing was the drink."

"Drink?" said Vivian. "I didn't know he drank."

"Yes, that was the whole thing, really. At first he wasn't so bad—he always had too much, it used to make

him bad-tempered and brutal—but he was more or less sensible. Then, after *Stones* was published, he was away three days, and then found like a log in a doss-house. It got too hideous, Vivian, you don't know."

"I've seen drunkards, I know how foul they are."

"I thought I knew a pretty good deal about drink, and drunkards," Phil went on, "but believe me, it was kindergarten stuff beside Guy. And the awful thing was that when he came round, for four or five days between these bouts he was far nicer than he'd ever been. I don't know whether it was conscience or what. But I knew that while he still wanted me I couldn't leave him."

"Did you still care for him, then?"

"God, yes! but you can't understand that, I know."

"Then?" said Vivian.

"Oh, things dragged on. It all became too appallingly degraded and beastly to tell you. He's vicious, too, and I stood for that as well."

"How d'you mean?" asked Vivian.

"Don't ask me to tell you. Not a pretty story. Oh, there's nothing I don't know about all the beastly sides of nature, believe me—and the other bits, too. Life's either grand or blue bloody hell when you're in love, take it from me. I think you're right to stay out of it. But then you're different from me anyway, so maybe the bad things wouldn't touch you. I'm a fool, I know, and damnable as it's all been I wouldn't change. But it's all over now. For ever."

"Have you left him for good?"

"Yes—or did he leave me? No, I think I walked out finally."

"What happened?"

"Oh, another woman at last. Not like the others, and not like me—she didn't want him, not at first. And that

piqued him. That's where I've always been such a mug—a plate offering—cheap to a degree. But she wasn't like that, and my God, what a looker ! I will say that—it was I who pointed her out to him to start with. She writes, too, I believe."

"Who was she?"

"Funny, isn't it? I never got to know her name. But she used to go to Morgano's in the evening sometimes for a drink, and someone told me she wrote books. Then I got ill—sort of form of malaria, or something, and had to go to Naples to the hospital. When I came back Guy was changed. Told me he'd gone on the wagon. I was overjoyed, but he seemed to avoid me. I couldn't think why. It never struck me it was another woman, because he never used to hide anything of that sort from me. He was all right the first week, then he became bloody awful. Not tight, but just cruel. Physically cruel, and mentally as well. For no reason at all he used to come up and twist my arm, once I thought he'd broken it. One morning he hit me, here on the shoulder; I nearly fainted. And other horrible things, too. I got terrified—if he'd been drinking I would have understood, but I thought he was really going mad. Then he took to staying away the whole night—and my nerves began to go to pot.

I know it's pretty low to have to confess one's held to someone by physical relationship, but it's true. I could put up with Guy's drunken bouts, and his brutality—even his vice—but when I realised he was no longer going to be my lover I thought I'd go mad, too. I'm like that, I suppose. Then I took to behaving like a fool. A man out there gave me some dope—it seemed to help. It went on for a few more weeks, then the bomb burst. Guy came and said he wanted me to leave him—charming, wasn't it? —as he'd found the ideal woman at last and was going to

marry her. Marry her ! Even then I hadn't realised it was this red-headed bitch. He wouldn't tell me who it was because he thought in a jealous fury I might kill her or something."

" How d'you know it was the girl ? " asked Vivian.

" Enrico Sforza, the man who gave me dope, sent me a snapshot on their wedding day."

" And now ? " asked Vivian.

" Now I've finished with men for ever. And if I heard of Guy's death to-morrow it wouldn't touch me. Thank God ! It's as if I'd cut a cancer out of myself."

" Still," said Vivian slowly, " I wonder if you'll be able to go on. All alone. You say some things mean a lot of importance to you."

" There are more things in heaven and earth—apparently—my innocent Vivian," and Phil, yawning, got up from the table. " Will you be at the Sporting Club to-night, because if so I'll look out for you ? You must meet Andrée."

" Robin and I will both come along about eleven. I'd like you to meet Robin, Phil—though he'll be rather dull and English to you, I expect. Dear Phil, I haven't said much to tell you how terribly, terribly sorry I am for all the hell you must have had. I'm awfully bad at expressing things, but you know, don't you, that if there's anything I can do to help . . ."

" Bless you," said Phil, squeezing her arm, " don't worry. It's all over now. That part, anyway."

. . . . . .

" So you see," said Vivian, as she and Robin were driving along the Corniche that night, " I do want to see if we can't help brighten her up a bit."

" Poor soul, she certainly sounds as if she'd had her

share of the world's worries. Still, you say you think she's got a Frenchman in tow now."

"Well, she said André. It's a French name. And they're at the Hôtel de Paris, too. He must be well off, because she hasn't much."

They wandered through the rooms rather aimlessly, Vivian playing roulette, Robin in search of a vacant place in the Salle de Baccarat. About one o'clock Vivian saw Phil—she was playing *trente et quarante*—dressed rather severely in black. She got up when she saw Vivian.

"I'd given you up," said Vivian.

"I've been here for hours," said Phil. "However, it's pretty boring—let's go and find a drink. And see if I can see Andrée."

"Did you lose?" asked Vivian.

"No, I won to-night. About £50 I think," and she yawned. Phil, with only her allowance from her father, yawned over winning £50! Vivian, with a few thousands a year of her own, shook with pleasure and blushed when she won a few pounds on the *bande*.

They found Robin, and the three of them went in search of some refreshment.

"Here comes Andrée," said Phil, suddenly. Vivian looked up, and to her very great surprise saw one of the loveliest women she'd ever seen coming slowly towards them.

"Andrée?" she said, looking at Phil. "I expected a man."

"After all I said?" said Phil. "Here, Andrée, I want you to meet Vivian Osborne—Baroness de Saarkoff, and Mr.—er—Masters. Have you had any luck, darling?"

"So-so. I was really ve-ry lucky. I lost £500, and then I won it back, and then more besides. Now what shall we all have? Come over to the hotel and get some-

thing there. Won't you?" She smiled at Vivian charmingly, and at Robin. "Come, Phil." She led the way and Vivian had time to take in her loveliness. She was a woman of about thirty, not too tall, and beautifully made. Slim without being thin, with a neck and arms looking as though they had been chiselled from alabaster. Her hair so pale that it looked almost silver—straight, sleek hair, parted in the middle and done with a low knot at the nape of her neck. She would have looked younger but for the very deep lines that shadowed her eyes. She was wearing a white satin gown that swept the floor as she walked, and an ermine cloak. No wonder everyone stopped and stared at her, Vivian thought, as they left the rooms. She wore wonderful jewellery, too, and ropes of obviously real pearls; diamond bracelets seemed to creep up her arms; and such wonderful rings, Vivian noticed.

The four of them stepped into the Baroness's Hispano that waited outside, and in less than five minutes they had reached the hotel. Phil led the way to an extremely luxurious suite, a *salon* that was filled with mimosa, carnations, even orchids. There were several pictures, photographs, standing on the tables about the room—faces of men who seemed familiar to Vivian. The Baroness rang, and presently a supper of caviare, champagne and delicious-looking hothouse fruit was brought in. It was an amusing evening, and Robin suggested that they should go and dance. Andrée de Saarkoff said she felt tired, and he could see that neither Vivian nor her friend was very keen. It was about half-past two when they left, the two women having promised to dine with Robin the following evening.

"We must get good chaps, Vivian," said Robin, "must make a good party. Have you ever seen anyone so stunning in your life?"

"As who?" asked Vivian, smiling.

"Why, the Baroness, of course. My Lord . . ."

Next day Robin seemed very restless. It seemed as if the day would never drag to an end for him. The dinner was a success, however, Robin having asked an old Etonian friend, who was in the Diplomatic, and a French tennis player. Robin was a very good dancer, and so, obviously, was the Baroness, who seemed to take all his homage and admiration for granted. She looked lovely in silver, with a spray of gardenias on her shoulder. Robin could not dance tangos, and during the evening Henri, the professional, came up and bowed to the Baroness. Vivian noticed Robin looked rather glum as his eyes followed her round the room.

"What's the matter, Robin?" she asked him, quietly.

"What'd she want to go round with that horrible little dago for?" he said angrily.

"Because he's a divine dancer, I expect, and you can't tango. Don't be absurd, Robin, you look like a sulky schoolboy. I'm sure that won't amuse her."

For the next few days Robin disappeared at intervals—curiously long disappearances. And Vivian did not see either Phil or the Baroness. Then one day when she was sitting alone in the garden at the villa Phil was announced.

"Hullo, my dear, I thought I'd come and look you up. Andrée has gone off to Cannes for the day. Why haven't you been in Monte the last few days?"

"I've been feeling rather lazy, and Robin has been busy."

"Talking of Robin," said Phil, "I don't know how much money he has, but he's keeping us in flowers at the moment."

"You don't mean it?" Vivian was amused.

"The most marvellous things arrive every morning."

"So that's what he's up to," said Vivian, and a thought

struck her. "Is it Robin she's gone motoring with to-day?"

Phil nodded. Vivian chuckled.

"Rather sweet, isn't it? Of course I saw the other night he'd fallen rather heavily, but he might have told me."

"Perhaps he thought you'd be jealous?"

"No, he knows I wouldn't. I say, Phil, I think she must be rather taken with him, too, don't you? What fun!"

"Do you really think so?" said Phil slowly, and then shook her head.

"Tell me about Andrée," said Vivian. "I haven't been able to ask you before."

"She's Russian. But, like many Russians, has no country of her own now and feels at home anywhere. Speaks practically every language. D'you admire her?"

"Yes," said Vivian, "I think she's perfectly lovely. Is she a great friend of yours?"

"Yes. She is indeed."

"Is she married?"

"She's a widow, really. She was married at nineteen to an old man. She's had a strange story in a way."

"Tell me," said Vivian.

"Her father was a Duke of sorts, and a General. Lost all his money in the War. De Saarkoff was a banker and bought Andrée practically. He did most of his business in America and Holland, and was terrifically rich. In the Revolution her father was killed, so really it was all rather pointless—her having married him—except that she's never stopped living in complete luxury, of course, for a single moment—poverty would kill her, she's like a hot-house plant. She's very clever in lots of ways, but then most Russians are. De Saarkoff only lived till the end of the War—he married her when he was far too old, and couldn't keep the pace! He had a stroke finally."

"What did he want to marry her for if he was such an old man? Couldn't he have just adopted her or something?"

"My dear, surely you've only to look at her to realise what a greedy, rich old man would want her for?" Phil laughed in a hard manner. "And Andrée's father would not have stopped at 'something,' as you suggest. Though he wasn't above selling her for old Saarkoff's money as long as his name went with it. Anyway, when he died he made her one of the richest women in Europe, but she loses every single penny the day she marries again."

"How rotten!" Vivian cried.

"It doesn't really worry her very much, she hates men."

"She had lots of photographs of them in her room!" Vivian said. "Who were they?"

"Lovers. Oh, believe me, they've all buzzed round in plenty."

"But if she hates them?" objected Vivian.

"It amuses her to torture the brutes. They don't revolt her or anything—she just despises them like hell. And I don't blame her. You see, one can't begin to count the men who've wanted to marry her—until they hear about the money. That's a terrific blow for even the rich ones. She always tells them about her money, and she once told me that not one man has still wished to marry her after he's heard she loses it all if she remarries. As they all want her pretty badly, they generally beg to be allowed to be her lover. You saw the collection—some of them—nearly every one of them famous or notorious in one way or another."

"But d'you mean she lets them?" said Vivian, in indignant amazement.

"Once only. She then asks for a signed photograph, and the next time they arrive on the doorstep asking for

more, they get some sort of a note or other, telling them where they get off ! I don't think Andrée has ever accepted anything from a man except flowers, and the photograph for the collection. I think it's a grand idea, serves them right ! "

" How did you meet her, Phil ? " Vivian asked.

" In Naples—when I was ill. She'd been ill there, too, with appendicitis."

" She must be really rather lonely," said Vivian.

" She's got me," said Phil, rather snappily.

" Still . . ." Vivian said, vaguely.

" What d'you mean . . . 'still' . . . ? I should have thought you were one of the people who would have understood. . . . You always pretend to dislike men so much."

" Oh, I see your point," Vivian said quickly, " I think it must be lovely for you, and after the way Guy treated you I should feel like going into a convent, I expect."

Phil raised her eyebrows questioningly. " But Andrée looks so like a woman that should be made for men. Taken care of, if you know what I mean."

" Oh, quite." Phil spoke dryly. " I flatter myself I'm capable of looking after her as well as any of the men she's known."

" I should have thought women would have bored her."

" You would, would you ? "

" Well, really, Phil, to hear you talk one would imagine you were in love with her yourself," and Vivian laughed heartily.

" I am." Phil spoke almost coldly.

" Oh, you are priceless ! " Vivian laughed. " Hullo, here's some tea. And here's Robin's mother. You don't know her, do you ? "

. . . . . .

Sometimes Robin would stay away whole days on end. At nights he seemed so nervy whenever the telephone bell rang that Vivian felt sure that Mrs. Masters must notice it.

"Have you and Robin quarrelled?" she asked finally, one day.

"Good gracious, no!" Vivian replied quickly. "Whatever makes you think so?"

"He's always out without you. It's not like him. I don't know what's come over him lately. Has he been losing much at the tables, silly boy?" asked his mother anxiously.

"Why, no," Vivian said. "Don't worry, Mrs. Masters. I think he's rather keen on someone. That's all, and he takes her out motoring."

"But, my dear," wailed the woman, "I did so hope that it was you, and——"

"Yes, I know! But you see neither of us feel a bit like that about each other."

"But who is this creature? It's so extraordinary of Robin not to bring her to see me if he's really in love with her. Is she young, is she pretty, is she a lady?" Mrs. Masters spoke at random.

"Her name's Baroness de Saarkoff."

"A foreigner," cried the old lady.

"She's a rich widow and lives with my friend, Phil Tyler, the one you met the other evening."

"Oh dear, oh dear! A widow—I do so distrust foreign widows. Always out for any young boy they can get. Still, you say she has money of her own."

"I shouldn't think she'll do Robin any harm at all," said Vivian rather shortly. "She's always haunted by men and people who are after her for her money, many famous men, too, and I expect it's a relief for her to have an ordinary English boy with a simple crush for a change."

"It's not at all like Robin to go tearing off, leaving us both very rudely, I consider, for a simple . . . whatever you call it. However, you probably know. You're his age, more or less. But do try and get him to confide in you."

. . . . . .

Meanwhile, Robin, his heart beating fast, his hands shaking with emotion, drove the Sunbeam to a standstill on the higher Corniche road.

"You don't have to be back in a tremendous hurry, do you?" He turned to Andrée de Saarkoff, who sat beside him—beautiful and still. "It's not eight o'clock yet, and look at the night. Look below us . . . the lights . . . and the stars in the sky. . . ." His throat felt parched, his hands hot, he didn't know what sort of rot he was talking. As long as he could stay out there alone with her, for just a little bit longer.

"You don't know what this day has meant to me," he began. "I can't even thank you for spending the whole of it with me. It must have seemed such a frightful waste of time, and——"

"But I keep telling you I did enjoy it all so much, Robin."

"D'you really mean it . . . Andrée?"

She nodded. He flushed. That day she had told him he might call her Andrée—what a gift, he felt. And yet each time he hesitated before saying her name—it seemed sacrilege for his lips. Oh, why, he wondered, must one always want just a little more? He had been happy till to-day to be near her—to dance with her. . . . But now he wanted so terribly to have her once more in his arms, but they were not dancing, and surely she would never forgive him if he presumed.

"When shall I . . . can I . . . see you again?" he began.

"Well," Andrée paused, and looked at him searchingly. "I don't know. Maybe I will have to go to Paris to-morrow."

"You don't mean it!" Robin felt as if his death-knell had struck.

"I must leave soon, you know."

"But—but—why suddenly? I mean, this afternoon in Cannes you said you'd be here another week."

"Did I?" Andrée stifled a yawn.

"I say—I haven't done anything to offend you? Or have I bored you so awfully that——?"

"You silly boy!" She threw back her head and laughed. "No, I'll stay a bit longer if it will please you."

"Please me!" Robin drew his hand through his hair. "Oh, God! Andrée, I don't care what sort of an ass you think me, but I can't keep it in any longer. You see, I worship you. So terribly. I know it's damn cheek even telling you so, because I know you must have hundreds of men crazy about you—but there it is."

Andrée took his hand and stroked it. Robin looked at her. He knew he could never hope to be anything in her life at all, and he felt that if only he could kiss her, kiss those devastating lips, he wouldn't mind dying to-morrow. Whatever happened, life would hold nothing for him when she left, so . . .

"Do you have to go back to your husband?" he whispered, jealously.

"My husband has been dead for years." She was surprised. "Don't you know that I'm a widow?"

A strange feeling came over Robin. If she was a widow it meant she was free . . . if she was free, surely she would have married again if there had been someone she cared for . . . so that probably there was nobody and . . .

"D'you live by yourself?" he asked, almost hoarsely.

Andrée smiled. Always the same, these creatures, whether they were young, middle-aged or old.

"With my friend Phil Tyler now."

"You're not going to marry anyone else, I mean?"

"I don't think so."

He swallowed. He didn't dare ask her.

"You see, if I marry again I lose all my money."

"Would it be a very great deal?" Robin started rapid calculations. Andrée was really getting amused. What a strange boy. The English, of course—one never knew what to expect from them. But here was someone at last who was not apparently dismayed at the idea of her wealth leaving her, who, it seemed, did not even realise how rich she was.

"Yes, Robin. It is too much to give up—for one man. I've never met one worthy of the sacrifice, that is." He felt chilled.

"But there must be thousands of men who would lay down their lives for you—rich ones, too." It was a glum thought; but in fairness to her he had to say so.

"You would be surprised, Robin, but I cannot count them on my fingers—let alone in thousands. Nobody wants me without my money."

"But I just don't understand. You're far more beautiful than anyone I've ever met before. And other girls are married with no money at all, often."

"I think I would be no good either poor myself or a poor man's wife. And it doesn't interest me to be someone's mistress," and she looked at him from the corners of her eyes. His tan face flushed with indignation.

"Good God!" he exclaimed. "Surely no one would ever dream of insulting you."

"*Mon cher* Robin, plenty of men have. And not thought it an insult either."

"I should like to thrash any man who would dare!" he began.

"Would you not want me that way—if you could—Robin?" and Andrée de Saarkoff turned to him and looked at him.

"I would give anything in the world to—to marry you," he said falteringly.

"No, Robin, it's no use. You see I do love my money—you don't know how many thousands a year my income runs into. I don't know myself, but I could not give it all up."

"If I broke the bank?" said Robin, wildly.

She laughed. "No, Robin. Besides, you see I don't love you. Wouldn't it be a little selfish of you to want me to?"

"Yes, yes, of course, of course," muttered Robin.

"And now, I think we should go on, Robin. It is getting late, and . . ." Robin shut his eyes and nodded. He must pull himself together, not be a fool.

"Kiss me, Robin," Andrée said, softly. "You may, you know. I will let you—to thank you for wanting me as a poor man's wife. Ah, my dear!" because she saw a gleam of hope in his eyes, "I know you are not poor, but it would be to me. Besides, I'm older than you, and everything would be quite, quite impossible and useless."

Robin bent and kissed her, rather gently, on the lips.

"What a sweet, brotherly creature you are!" Andrée spoke rather drily. "See, I will kiss you, too. For luck, because I think you are such a nice person." She drew his head down and slowly and deliberately kissed him.

"Andrée, Andrée. . . ." What had he done to deserve such happiness? He felt he must be in a dream, he drew her closer, kissed her eyes, her neck, her lips.

"No, no, Robin, now we must really go." She drew herself away from him.

"I'm sorry. Forgive me." He pulled himself up with a jerk, and started the engine. All the way back to Monte Carlo neither of them spoke a word. They drew up outside the hotel. Robin's eyes shone with excitement and passion.

"I can never thank you enough——" he began again.

"Don't be silly," she said. All the way home her mind had been working. He was different to all the rest, this boy. He was so sincere. And his very sincerity and boyishness annoyed her. And his inability to make love to her, his almost prudish kisses. True, she was weary of such experienced and ardent love-making as she was accustomed to receiving. This English boy . . . it would be amusing . . . just once. . . .

"Come to the Sporting Club to-night," she said quietly. "I think Phil is going out with some friends. I shall be alone. No, I won't dine," she said, as the quick invitation rose to his lips, "but meet me there about eleven o'clock."

That evening both Vivian and Mrs. Masters noticed his exuberant spirits.

"You seem to have had a good day, eh?" Vivian drawled.

"Oh, Vivian! . . ."

"Are you terribly in love with her?" she asked.

Robin wheeled round. Should he tell her? He was of the school that keeps love locked honourably in the heart, 'he that kisses and tells should be shot.' But then he wouldn't mention that Andrée had let him kiss her. But Vivian was such a rattling good sort, he felt he must tell someone.

"On your honour, Vivian, you know—not a word to your pal Phil. . . ."

Vivian shook her head.

"Yes, I'm crazy mad, potty-to-hell about her. She's been just too marvellous for words to me. And to crown all, I'm seeing her to-night, too."

"Do tell me all about it!" begged Vivian.

"I can't—quite—it's rather a horrible sort of thing to do, y'know. Not that I mean," he added hurriedly, "there's anything of that sort, you know what I mean, but she's sort of too wonderful to talk about."

"It must be heavenly to love somebody like that," said Vivian.

"Yes—and yet it's all so damn hopeless. Sorry. But I mean she won't marry me, and——"

"D'you mean you actually asked her to?" Vivian's eyes grew.

"Well, of course. If a chap's as crazy about a woman as I am about her, naturally he wants to marry her. But you're a girl, you can't know about that sort of thing——"

"You mean you want to sleep with her?" Vivian said bluntly, and was never so much surprised as when she heard herself speaking. As for Robin, he was dumbfounded.

"Vivian!" he expostulated.

"Well, that's what it all seems to boil down to, Robin," said Vivian wearily. "For years now I've been trying to get the hang of it all."

"But you—a girl——!"

"Well, damn it!" flared Vivian, "seeing as I am one of the ones who suffers from that sort of thing—objective case, so to speak—I suppose I can think about it."

"But you're not even engaged!"

Vivian felt like shaking him.

"If you must know, Robin—but keep it to yourself, please—someone tried that stuff on with me, when I first came out, and well—I hated it so much that that's the reason I've puzzled about it ever since."

"Oh," said Robin. He felt shocked. He'd always imagined Vivian as apart from sex in every way. "D'you mean you're not . . . well. . . ."

"I don't see it's anything to do with you, Robin, what I am, or what I'm not. But it rather put me off men, I think, for ever. I don't want to be wanted that way."

Robin thought a long time.

"I say, it's never struck me before. I wonder if women do find it all very boring? I suppose to certain types of girls, there are things," he flushed a little—after all, he couldn't help remembering Vivian was a girl—"that might disgust them or frighten them. At first, I mean. But I never thought of it as boring. But it might be."

"You're right, it might. It would bore me, for instance. But don't you worry, Robin, from all one reads in books women are much of a muchness with men. I'm in the minority—it can't be helped. Still, I do see your point of view. Andrée is so lovely, I'm sure if I were a man I'd be awfully keen on her."

"She is glorious, isn't she?" He turned to her enthusiastically.

"Tell me, did you ask her if you could see her again to-night?"

"No—that's an amazing bit of luck, too. She asked me."

There was a pause.

"She can't think me a complete dud, can she?"

"Why no, Robin. I should think she must like you. Really. Because Phil says she doesn't care a hang for men, not even the——"

"The what?" asked Robin suspiciously.

"The ones who fall in love with her," Vivian said hastily. She knew it would hurt him, probably shock him dreadfully if he knew that Andrée had lovers.

"I say, did she really? What else did she say?"

"I can't remember much." Vivian did not know how much Andrée de Saarkoff might or might not have told him about herself. "Phil seems to worship her."

"I should think that would bore Andrée," said Robin, masculine pride ringing in his voice. "I should think your friend is a bit nervy, isn't she?"

"Well, so'd you be if you'd been treated in the awful way she has."

"Yes, I daresay you're right," Robin mused. "Lucky for her to have Andrée as a friend. All the time, I think it's a pity to get hysterical and dopy. Sloppy friendship between women, or between boys—seen it at school—is pretty nauseating. Not that, of course, there could never be anything like that with Andrée. Good lord, if there was ever a man's woman——"

"I don't know what you're talking about, and I'm going in." Vivian spoke crossly. Something in Robin's tone, in his manner, upset her. Always wanted to own everything, men did. Couldn't even help jealousy creeping in between a perfectly jolly friendship between a couple of girls. If it hadn't been for her, he'd never have met Andrée in the first place. Good lord, if one couldn't have a girl as a friend! And as she changed for dinner her mind somehow or another drifted back to her school days, and the fuss that was made there if two people seemed particularly friendly. Not that she had ever wanted to be one of the Inseparables, as they were called in derision at Woodbridge. And she remembered Miss Macdonald and how she had always been down on Phil whenever she got the chance. Only because she thought she was becoming too intimate with her, Vivian knew. And it suddenly struck her how friendless she was really. And she envied Phil her love for Andrée, and wondered if they both appreciated each other.

. . . . . .

"Well, Robin," said Andrée, at about three o'clock in the morning, "at last I feel a little tired. Will you take me back to the hotel?"

He drove her back in silence; the mere being with her seemed enough. "Come up and have one more drink," she said, as he helped her out.

"May I? I'd love to—thank you terribly," he stammered in his eagerness.

"Ring the bell and order some champagne, will you? And d'you mind if I leave you for just a little minute and get into something more comfortable?"

The waiter came. Robin tried to hide his eagerness while he ordered the champagne in as nonchalant a voice as he could muster. He heard Andrée humming in the next room—the 'Vissi d'arti' from *Tosca*—he knew it was that, because that was the only opera he'd ever been to, and he had been with her to hear it at the Monte Carlo Opera three nights ago.

"That will always be my favourite song," he called out, "and it will always make me think of you."

"Yes?" And Andrée came into the room, slowly, looking lovelier than ever, thought the young man, in a pink *négligé*.

"Where's Phil, by the way?" he asked, as casually as he could.

"She's left a note saying she's gone to bed with a bad headache and doesn't want to be wakened. So we must be very quiet," she added in a whisper.

"Good for Phil," Robin thought gleefully, and handed Andrée some champagne.

"Open the window and let the night in, Robin. It's quite warm, and I love the quiet of Monte Carlo at night—there's a noisy silence about it which rather excites me." He opened the shutters and they walked out on to the balcony.

"How quiet it is," he whispered. He was standing behind her; presently he put his arms round her.

"Why, you're cold," he said, because she shivered slightly.

"No, not really. I suppose I ought to send you away." She spoke slowly.

"Let me stay just a few minutes longer. It's all like a mad dream to me: I know I shall wake any second."

"I don't want you to go," said Andrée in a whisper.

"Don't look at me like that, or I shall—well, I shall——"

"I don't think I mind very much, Robin," and she closed her eyes.

Robin took her in his arms. The champagne—he had drunk a good deal since the start of the evening—was it perhaps beginning to work? wondered Andrée. He pressed her close, closer, kissing her arms, her neck, her eyes, her ear——

"Stop!" Andrée gasped. "Anyone might see us out here. Come." In his delirium he did not notice that she had drawn him to the other room, her own room. Open windows look much the same to a young man very much in love. Andrée did not turn up the light, the moon shone through the open partition of the shutters. She stumbled and felt her way. She realised she was standing by the side of the bed.

"Now, kiss me and go," she whispered. Robin took her in his arms and kissed her.

"I can't leave you—I can't!" He shook, his voice was hoarse.

"Then stay," and Robin felt her body crumple beneath his.

"Angel, angel!" he whispered.

. . . . . .

Next morning Vivian was in Monte Carlo, and suddenly saw Robin coming out of a shop.

"Hullo—you left the villa very early—what are you up to!"

"Get into the car—I want to know if you think this is good or not—here——" And he put a parcel into her lap. "Open it and have a look."

Vivian carefully unfolded the box. Inside it was quite the most beautiful white jade Madonna she had ever seen. She gasped.

"A Madonna—for Andrée?" She couldn't believe her eyes, yet she knew it could be for no one else.

"Only just until I've got the ring. It's the only thing I could find that I thought would be worthy of her."

"Ring, what ring?" Vivian felt stunned.

"We're going to be married."

"*You're going to marry Andrée?* You mean she's willing to chuck up her entire fortune for you?"

"Listen, you're not to say a word to a soul. Promise. Until it's definitely settled."

"No, of course not. But are you—I mean, has she really actually said she'll marry you?"

Robin felt at a loss for words. Marriage had been spoken of again. But naturally, after last night . . . that had been marriage, at any rate to him. What service or wedding ring could seal any further such a consummation as theirs had been? But still, of course, as his wife . . . naturally . . .

"Well, I'm glad you like it," he said hurriedly, avoiding her eyes, avoiding her question. "And now I must leave you and go to her with this." He almost pushed her out of the car.

When Robin reached the hotel he sent up his name, but was told that the Baroness de Saarkoff was not yet awake.

This dejected him slightly, and he left the box with a note to be given to her.

Later in the morning a telephone message came through that the Baroness de Saarkoff would like to see Mr. Masters at six o'clock that evening—and that she could not see him before. Vivian suggested that they should go to Mont Agel and play some golf. His mind was anywhere but on the game, and she beat him hollow.

"Pull yourself together, Robin," Vivian spoke; "you're going to make a moody sort of lover, I can see."

"Sorry, old girl. I'm worried, that's all."

"Because you can't see your lady love till six o'clock?"

"There must be some reason, and I can't think what in hell it can be, unless it's something awful, and presentiment tells me it is."

"Oh, nonsense!" said Vivian, but without much conviction. She noticed how listless and nervy he was to-day. He looked ill, too, she couldn't remember when she had seen him with such shadows beneath his eyes.

"I don't know what time you kept her up to last night, but I never heard you come in. I should think you tired her out, and she's been sleeping all day."

Robin did not answer her.

Gradually the hours went by, and six o'clock came round.

"Don't expect me for dinner. I don't know when I shall be back. Tell Mother anything you like."

Vivian decided not to go out that night. Mrs. Masters and she played bezique till half-past ten, and then the older woman retired to bed. Vivian settled down to read before turning in. It was about half-past eleven when she heard the car drive in, and presently the front door banged. Steps, unsteady ones, came towards her. She put down her book and listened, waiting. Robin opened the door

and came in. She saw at once something had happened; he looked dreadful, and talked thickly, as if he'd been drinking too much.

"Thought you'd have gone to bed," he muttered, and fell into a chair.

"Where have you been, Robin? What have you been doing?" Vivian asked.

"Trying to get drunk and not succeeding," he said sourly. He took out a cigarette, his hand shook as he tried to light it. "I can't believe it, Vivian," he muttered, "can't believe she meant it, after what happened. I can't think she's like that."

"You'd better tell me." Vivian could guess only too well what had occurred. Poor Robin!

"Vivian, I love her so terribly, and I thought she must care about me, too. She's so obviously not the sort of woman who'd give herself to anyone. I told her I'd give anything in the world to marry her. Without her money . . . she had some ridiculous bee in her bonnet that people only wanted her money." Robin got up and helped himself to a whisky and soda. "As if her money meant a thing to me. Then last night I went back with her. She was so perfectly divine—and I lost my head—and anyway, well of course I never dreamed that she would refuse to marry me now."

"Is this the first time you've been in love, Robin?" Vivian asked him.

"Yes. Why? Oh, I've had silly little affairs when I was a boy, when I was quite young."

"You're so very old now, aren't you?"

"I don't know what you mean. I only know that nothing can ever be the same again. It's the illusion that's gone—it's like finding oneself without God, suddenly."

"Because she won't marry you?"

"That's hell enough in itself, but it's the reason." Vivian was silent. "Vivian, she loves someone else."

Vivian looked up, surprised. She knew about Andrée's lovers, past lovers, surely she had not told him about the strings of men that had gone before him? Wasn't that hurting unnecessarily? Perhaps Phil had not told her everything? After all, why should she have done so? There was one man then, perhaps.

"Can you imagine it," Robin went on, "letting me be her lover, and belonging to someone else all the time?"

"Perhaps, Robin, she just did it out of kindness. She saw how much you were in love with her and gave herself as a sort of present, don't you know?"

"But good God, Vivian! That's being no better than a—a harlot! She's not like that——"

"Is she going to marry this other man?"

"No, says she can't. She laughed when I asked her. Says she keeps both her money and her love. I don't know what she meant." Vivian thought she knew. Apparently there was somebody who, after all, did not need to send his picture along with the gallery of others.

Suddenly the telephone went. Vivian went into the hall to answer it.

"Well, who was that?" Robin asked.

"That was Phil. She said I was to say it was no use. And that was to say good-bye—they're leaving to-morrow."

"What!" Robin sprang up with a cry. "I must go back and see her. Perhaps she'll listen now. If I promise not to pester her—if I tell her that all I want is to—to be her servant, her slave." He paced up and down the room raving like a lunatic, Vivian trying her best to pacify him.

Presently he seemed calmer, and Vivian went upstairs. In the middle of the night she woke with a start. Someone

was walking on the gravel path outside. She went to the window. "Who's there?" she called softly.

"It's I—Robin—I can't stand it. I'm going over to Monte Carlo."

"But you're mad, at this time of night! You can't! You can't wake her up, supposing . . ."

"Yes—just supposing!" And before she could say another word he was gone.

Vivian had no idea what time it was when Robin left the house, but it was just half-past five when he returned. She heard him go softly to his room. And then open his window. There was silence, and there was something eerie and unnatural about it. Why didn't he move? She crept out of bed, and along the balcony that led to his window. He was sitting in a chair, his face was bowed in his hands. She must have made some noise because he looked up. She wanted to cry out. Never in anybody's face had Vivian ever seen such a look of anguish or tortured horror. She ran into the room and threw her arms round him.

"Robin, darling Robin, don't look like that!" she cried.

He pushed her away without seeming to realise her.

"What have you done, Robin? Tell me, tell me! Can't I help?" Vivian was terrified. Supposing in his mad fit of frenzy he had done something frightful? Killed Andrée—or this lover. Suddenly he burst into laughter, hideous, dreadful laughter.

"Be quiet, be quiet, for God's sake, you'll wake up everyone in the house!" Vivian beseeched.

"You don't know what I've been saved from—you can't guess—it's all so . . . that I can't tell you about it." He used terrible words that Vivian did not know the meaning of. Suddenly he turned and took Vivian by the

shoulders and shook her till her teeth rattled. "I'm going," he said, "leaving the whole bloody lot of you. Your friend . . ." and he started to curse once more. Vivian felt terrified. She didn't know what he was talking about.

"But what have you done to Andrée?" she whispered.

"Left her where I found her—with her lover!" And before Vivian could stop him Robin had opened the door, torn downstairs, flung himself into the car and was off.

. . . . . .

There was no news of Robin for three days. Mrs. Masters was almost out of her mind. No one had seen him, and stranger still, not a sign of his missing Sunbeam. The fourth day the charred wreck of his car, burnt beyond recognition, identified by its number-plates, was found at the foot of the Esterelles. He had obviously been driving, at what rate no one would ever know, probably in the dark, missed the turn of the bend in the road, and had crashed through the gaping precipice to his death. It was a terrible shock for everybody, though Vivian felt no surprise, only a great pain. She tried to feel resentment and hate for Andrée, but only failed. Perhaps it had been an accident after all? She prayed that it might be so. She had loved Robin devotedly as a brother and felt a great void with his death. Mrs. Masters crumpled up completely when the news came, and was taken by her brother, the Chaplain, to a Home at Nice.

Vivian, as soon as the memorial service was over, sad and weary at heart, left for England.

VI

It was not until the summer of 1927 that Vivian saw Phil again. The Easter following Robin Masters' death Vivian returned to Devon and spent most of the year there. She decided to sell Dulbridge—the big house itself and the grounds. There was an attractive cottage belonging to the estate, and she decided to keep this for herself, with a few acres. The thought of London and the few people she knew there sickened her. London had been fun while Robin was alive, without him it only held memories. It was time to go back to the country, anyway, and she felt it called her. So she settled down, bought a couple of hunters, and for over a year led the life of the usual country-bred English girl, and enjoyed it. People were kind to her; she was never at a loss for something to do, somewhere to go. Flora Macdonald came to her when she could leave Woodbridge, and Vivian was as happy as she could be, taking into consideration that she had nobody at all on whom she depended or who depended on her. No family—which she could not miss, never having known real family life. No husband or lover—that did not worry her. No particular friend of her own age—and here she sometimes thought of Phil and Andrée with a certain amount of envy. But she had never met anybody who could occupy such a place in her life. True, she was fond of Flora Macdonald, as fond of her as she was of anyone, but as the years went by, even Vivian realised what an almost sickening attitude the older woman de-

veloped for religion. She seemed to grow more bigoted, narrower as regards the world and all that goes on in it. She seemed to expect everyone to live up to such an incredibly high standard.

Vivian, living her life in the country—hunting, surrounded by hunting folk, breeders, farmers—Vivian was very much of the earth these days and thought nothing of having a farmer or two in to a meal, and could not understand Flora Macdonald's objections when, as often happened, some coarser detail was freely discussed in front of her.

Then, one day in June in '27, Vivian decided to spend a week in town. It was the first week of the tennis championships at Wimbledon, and de Grühling, the young player she had met on the Riviera, was playing for the first time in England. She managed to get hold of a ticket for the centre court, found by an advertisement in the Agony Column of *The Times*. So she packed a suit-case, booked a room at Brown's, and set off in the Renault. One morning she woke to find a pouring wet day—obviously there would be no play. What should she do? And then she realised it was years since she had been to the Academy. She would spend the afternoon at Burlington House. Wandering round the galleries later someone bumped into her. She turned to apologise, and saw Phil.

"What an extraordinary coincidence!" she exclaimed. "But I am glad."

"We're only over here for a week or two," said Phil. "I never dreamt you were in London."

"I came up for a week, just for a change. I've never been to Wimbledon, and a ticket came my way, young de Grühling's playing—d'you remember him? Is Andrée here?"

"She's in England with me, but hasn't come here. What fun to see you! I've come to look at the Smacks."

"Oh, yes?" said Vivian, rather vaguely.

"Leo Smack—you must have heard of him. He's famous—I was lucky enough to get a few lessons from him in Paris ages ago. A naturalised Dutchman."

"Oh, yes, I know," said Vivian, hurriedly, never having heard the great man's name before.

"He has three pictures in this year—he's never exhibited actually here before."

"Where are they, d'you suppose?" asked Vivian politely.

"Let's see." She turned to the catalogue. "Portrait of a Man, 313; Enigma, 518; Posillippo at Sunset, 540."

"I seem to have heard of one of them, Enigma," said Vivian, trying to search her brain. "I can't think how, or where."

They strolled from one room to the other, Vivian without very great interest, rather as a duty; Phil intently critical.

"Oh!" Suddenly Vivian drew up in front of a portrait. "Why, of course." It was a head and shoulders portrait of a girl. The flaming red hair, loose, untidy, standing like a halo round her head, those long, slanting, mysterious green eyes, which matched the green shirt she wore, open at the neck—the face seemed to gaze right into the eyes of the onlooker. Aloof, yet questioning. And Vivian felt herself swept back years, back into the chapel at Woodbridge, her confirmation. . . .

"God Almighty!" Phil spoke abruptly. "That's my late rival. What an amazing thing to run up against. With you, too, of all people——"

"What d'you mean?" Vivian asked.

"That's the woman Guy chucked me for."

"Virginia Clare," said Vivian. . . . Yes, that had been her name.

"What! Do you know her?" Phil asked in astonishment.

Vivian then told Phil the little she knew. How it was she had seen her, how she had felt herself drawn towards her, for some reason or other.

"But I completely forgot her existence. What an extraordinary thing, Phil. I believe she was a journalist."

"Yes," mused Phil; "though I never knew her name. I believe she has written an autobiography thing about her days in France at the War. Amazing that I never knew that it was the same woman—Virginia Clare."

"Are they still together?" asked Vivian, rather nervously. "D'you know?"

"I neither know nor care. It all means nothing, less than nothing to me now."

Vivian asked Phil to come back to the hotel, but she couldn't as she and Andrée were going to the Opera to hear *Turandot*.

"Why don't you both come down to the cottage next week, or any week-end?" she asked. "I'd love it, and I should love to see Andrée again, too."

Phil said she would ask Andrée and would let her know. The next morning she rang through to say they would both go down the following week.

"Hurray!" cried Vivian. "But I warn you it'll be very quiet, nothing to do much. I hope she won't be too bored."

"No, no, of course not. It'll be a rest for her, she needs one badly."

"Will your father think it odd?" asked Vivian.

"Oh, lord! I'd forgotten all about him. Need he know I'm down there?" She spoke hesitatingly.

"Well, I don't see why he should. The cottage is nowhere near the Grange, and if you don't want to, you need not meet a soul."

The following week they arrived, driven by Phil in Andrée's Rolls coupé. Vivian was afraid that Andrée might prove rather difficult. She did not look exactly the type for Devonshire moors. The cottage was small, and Vivian had been obliged to warn her she could not bring a maid.

"You know what I should love," said Andrée the day after they had arrived. "I should just adore a gallop over those glorious moors of yours." Vivian was inclined to be doubtful. Both Fanfare and Black Beauty were high-spirited animals. Supposing she was not strong enough to manage them? Andrée de Saarkoff looked so very fragile as she lay in the hammock, her arm dangling.

"But, darling," said Phil quickly, "can you ride at all? I've never heard you speak of it."

"I have done so—when I was younger, you know."

Vivian could hardly refuse, and after tea she and Andrée set off on horseback, Phil following anxiously in the car.

"I don't believe she rides at all," she said to Vivian in a worried voice.

"She sits her animal all right," said Vivian with a glance of knowledge.

"Yes, I daresay, but . . . I wouldn't mind if I could join you, but since that accident when I broke my arm, you remember, I've never been able to ride again really. My wrist never healed properly, you know."

"Don't you worry," said Vivian.

Presently they reached the moor. The country lay beyond them, vast tracks of moorland, heather-carpeted; the sun was beginning to sink, the hills in the distance rose dark and mysterious. A few sheep were grazing, two stray forest ponies started out from a clump of trees near by and galloped away.

"My God, she's gone!" Phil suddenly screamed.

Vivian turned. There, sure enough, in the distance was Andrée, galloping as if she were leaving them for ever. Vivian was after her in a second. She had not gone far before she realised that Andrée was a first-class horsewoman; she rode Black Beauty like one used to his every mood. Almost five hundred yards ahead of her still, she suddenly turned, and to Vivian's surprise, while at full gallop, sprang to her saddle and standing at her full height rode to where Vivian was.

"Where on earth did you learn that?" gasped Vivian.

"On the Siberian steppes, when I was a child," she laughed. Her hat had fallen off and her long fair hair fell across her shoulders. She looked ridiculously young, thought Vivian. "My father was in command of a garrison for a long time out there. And later, when I was in Mexico after the War, I did a lot of broncho riding—oh! but this is heavenly," and she bent over Black Beauty and kissed his neck.

"There aren't many strange animals one could try that sort of stuff with, Vivian, but I felt this darling would be game. I say, Vivian, sell him to me—I'll give you anything you like for him."

"My dear, I'll give him to you," said Vivian, "in admiration."

"No, no!" started Andrée.

"Honestly, I mean it. It would give me real pleasure."

When they reached the car they found Phil sitting with a dead white face, shaking, her chin set.

"Don't ever do that sort of thing again, Andrée. I can't stand it."

"But don't you think I ride very nicely, darling?" said Andrée. "Vivian is so pleased, she is going to give me this heavenly Black Beauty." She turned to Vivian

and gave her a wink. Phil flushed angrily, put the car in gear and drove off.

"I feel like a naughty child," said Andrée dryly. "Isn't she absurd?"

Vivian said nothing, she felt rather uncomfortable about everything. When they reached the cottage, Phil had gone upstairs. She looked out of her window as they rode in. Vivian thought she looked as if she had been crying. Really her nerves must be in a very bad state. She went up to her room. Presently she heard Andrée go into Phil's room.

"What did you imagine was going to happen to me, for goodness' sake?" she heard her ask.

"How was I to know you could ride like that? Anything might have happened—I thought it was running away with you, you could have been thrown, killed even. . . ."

"Would you have minded so very terribly, then?" Andrée asked her.

"Don't be such a damned fool!" Vivian heard Phil reply gruffly, and then the door banged.

. . . . . .

In August Vivian took Flora Macdonald to Dieppe. She felt she would like to go to the sea, and Miss Macdonald, always pleased and ready to suggest a trip abroad, suggested Dieppe as being cheaper and less fashionable than other French resorts, and more amusing than most English places.

They had an amusing time, bathed, played *boulle* in the Casino, motored to Pourville, Veuilles-les-Roses, Rouen. One day she had a post card from Phil from Venice.

"I would like you to meet Phil Tyler," she said. They were lying with books on the cliffs of the golf links. "She's coming to England in September, couldn't you come down for the week-end before you go back to Woodbridge?"

Flora Macdonald said she would.

"What's happened to that unfortunate girl?—Is she still living in sin with that creature? Because if so, I'm not sure . . . though, of course, I'm the last person to wish to be unkind or narrow-minded."

"That creature, as you call him, has deserted her—thrown her over, after months of brutal ill-treatment—for somebody else."

"Well, well, well!" Flora Macdonald took off her pince-nez and started cleaning them. "I don't want to say the obvious, but after all, everything gets its deserts in this life."

"What an irritating remark," thought Vivian. "And so unfeeling."

"You can't go round breaking laws, you know, Vivian, the Seventh Commandment specially."

"Why not?" asked Vivian crossly. "Anyway, Christ was the first person to be nice to the woman taken in adultery, and——"

"Don't forget He said to her: 'Go and sin no more,' please. . . ."

"Well, anyhow, Phil's man has married an old friend of yours—Virginia Clare."

"Virginia Clare married! But this does interest me. I haven't heard of Virginia for years."

Vivian told Miss Macdonald as much about it as she knew. "And now Phil lives with a beautiful woman called Baroness de Saarkoff, a Russian widow."

"Well, I hope that's a better life for her," said Flora, conjuring up in her mind visions of penniless refugees.

. . . . . .

"Phil, I want you to be your best for Miss Macdonald," she said, one morning late in September. Phil had been at

Dulbridge with her father for a week, and was finishing her holiday at the cottage. Andrée was in Paris.

"She doesn't sound at all my type—I expect every gesture of mine will shock her."

"She's prepared for a Magdalene of the worst sort; I know she will be terribly, terribly easy to shock, but don't go out of your way to. Swearing and blaspheming, for instance."

"My dear, you know I wouldn't. I never do in front of you, even. I know you don't care for that sort of thing. But if she's one of these real proper repressed spinsters, I warn you if she gets my goat I'll let fly!"

"What a priceless-looking person!" she exclaimed to Vivian, giggling.

"Is she?" Vivian felt rather dismayed. She had never thought of looks where Miss Macdonald was concerned. She had always seemed above such earthly matters to her.

"She's like a dragoon."

On the whole Phil behaved with exemplary behaviour.

"But there's something I don't trust in her, Vivian," said Flora Macdonald one evening. "And she looks so hard. So different from you. There's one thing about her, though, that I like—she doesn't seem at all vain. Funny for a pretty girl like that, and she's certainly extremely pretty, to dress in such a masculine way."

"In contrast to Andrée, I suppose," said Vivian, lighting a cigarette.

"Andrée?" asked Flora Macdonald.

"Andrée de Saarkoff, her friend. The one she lives with."

"Oh, the refugee," said Flora.

"Refugee?" exclaimed Vivian. "Whoever said she was a refugee? She's very beautiful, and terribly rich—one of the richest women in Europe, as a matter of fact, and men just fall over themselves for her. But she won't marry

again because she would lose all her money—and anyway, she's far too fond of Phil."

"Do you know her well, yourself, Vivian? Is she—nice?"

"Yes—she's grand fun. Rides better than anyone I know, too. I met her in the South of France, and they've both been down here."

That night, before they went up to change for dinner, Vivian said: "You must see Andrée's photo."

"Have you one, then?" asked Flora Macdonald.

"No, I haven't, but Phil has." She rapped on Phil's door. "Phil, can Miss Macdonald see a photograph of Andrée? I've been telling her how beautiful she is."

"Come on in," cried Phil. "The room's in rather a mess, I'm afraid—I thought I'd pack to-night as I'm going off so early in the morning."

"There—isn't she lovely?" cried Vivian, her voice ringing with admiration.

"Very beautiful," remarked Flora Macdonald, in a toneless voice.

Phil looked slightly amused, and made a face at Vivian.

That evening Miss Macdonald was very silent at dinner, and begged to be excused early after dinner—a bad head.

"I wonder if she twigged?" Phil said to Vivian, when she had left the room. "She hardly spoke to me all dinner-time. Personally I should think she wouldn't know about that sort of thing."

"How d'you mean?" asked Vivian.

"Andrée's and my friendship."

"But what could she find wrong in it? As she thinks anything to do with men and that sort of thing so awful, I should think it would appeal to her."

"Don't forget that 'that sort of thing' comes into all sorts of love, my lamb."

There was a silence for a long time. Then Vivian spoke.

"Phil—do you mean you feel as if you were married to Andrée?" She spoke with amazement.

"What a dear innocent thing you are, Vivian," said Phil slowly. "Yes, that's how I do feel."

. . . . . .

Next day Phil left Dulbridge. Vivian motored her down to Exeter. Flora Macdonald was not down when she left.

"Say good-bye to the dragoon and give her my blessing—and if she says anything, tell her I'm surprised she's so up in her Greek."

Vivian found Flora Macdonald in the garden when she reached the cottage. She looked pained and stern. Vivian hoped she had not received bad news.

"I could not bring myself to come downstairs while you had that—that creature with you," she began.

Vivian flushed. "Are you talking of Phil?"

"Who else? But I can only imagine that you have no idea of the sort of person she was. Is, in fact."

"Miss Macdonald, please. I can't allow you to speak like this about a friend—a great friend of mine."

"I had always disliked the sound of her," Miss Macdonald said icily. "I imagined she was a low woman, a fast woman—but better far she had been, yes, a low street-walker, than the foul thing she is."

Vivian looked at the other woman, open-eyed, amazed. What on earth could she have discovered? . . .

"But you don't know, you can't know, you poor child. I can't judge you because you have been so horribly taken in, tricked into harbouring creatures that I shudder even to think about."

"Please go on," said Vivian quietly.

"I had my suspicions when you began to tell me about the beauty of this Russian baroness. I had thought Phil

Tyler was living with some poor refugee woman, helping her. Instead of which she is a wealthy creature, surrounded by men and worse. All Russians are vicious——"

"Miss Macdonald——"

"Then when I saw the photographs in her room a feeling almost of nausea came over me. I realised, of course, how blind I had been from the beginning about your friend herself—I can generally sense that sort of creature, smell them a mile off—but this morning my worst suspicions were confirmed. I found this." She took out of her bag a letter. It had been torn, but only in two pieces, and the halves were easily joined. "I found this in the grate in her room—a letter from her, her . . ." She shuddered.

"You mean to say," said Vivian, aghast and furious, "you deliberately went and poked about to see what you could find to——?"

"If one is on the scent of something criminal it is one's duty to pursue it," said Flora Macdonald.

"Never, never, have I heard of anything so frightful!" Vivian said.

"I knew you would think that when you knew."

"I'm not talking of that!" exclaimed the girl. "I don't care a damn what you found or thought you found, but this poking and prying about another guest of mine, into something that concerns not a soul except herself—why, I can't forgive it—ever!"

"You mean to say you're not going to do anything about this? I find the most incriminating love-letter written to this girl, by this other woman. . . ." Flora Macdonald could go on no further. She was speechless.

"There's nothing I shall do," Vivian said coldly.

Suddenly a look of frozen horror came into the older woman's eyes.

"Vivian. . . . Did you know all the time . . . about them?"

"If you mean did I know that Phil and Andrée de Saarkoff love each other devotedly, with a much greater love than either have known from any man—yes, I did."

"And it doesn't nauseate you, doesn't revolt you?"

"For two people like them to feel as they do? No."

"But don't you know it's wicked, it's unnatural, it's vicious, when two people of the same sex love like that? If you can use the word love of such a relationship."

"So is murder—killing—wrong; yet we bless every soldier that goes to war; and the more men he brings down with his gun the better hero he. Isn't all life one damn hypocrisy after the other? Isn't motherhood supposed to be the supreme Be All of a woman's existence, yet only if she can show a ridiculous little gold band on one of her fingers can she lift up her head if she has a baby. Marriage is supposed to be the romantic goal we make for. Don't more girls marry nowadays for money or position than for love? We go to weddings. Huge crowds surge outside fashionable churches to see two people legally joined together so that they can sleep together——"

"Vivian, Vivian . . . are you mad?"

"Yes, I think I am," panted Vivian, "but I think I can see things, understand things. . . ."

"Horrible things, unnatural things," Miss Macdonald cried.

"Would you like to hear the story of both these girls' lives? I'll tell you." And deliberately, sparing no details, she spoke of Andrée de Saarkoff's past, her marriage, her disillusions, and then the coming of Phil into her life. Then she told Phil's story, her tortures, her ills, her sufferings with Guy.

"There they are, two women, both still young, both very attractive, beaten both in body and soul by men. They know what it is to love, what it is to want. . . . Are you blaming them for giving to each other love that——"

"Of course I blame them, condemn them . . . and so does the world, and every decent man and woman in it. Love! You talk of love! That sort of thing isn't love—it's just desire, and criminal and revolting in this sort of case. No, there is no excuse for that sort of thing—never has been or ever will be. Are you going to tell me that two people can't help it? Nobody has ever had anything but praise for a real, solid, warm friendship, but this. . . ."

"What about David and Jonathan?"

"My dear Vivian, if you're going to quote the Bible in a case of this sort, go to the correct source of foundation and talk of Sodom and Gomorrah."

There was a moment's pause.

"I am alone, am I, because I don't stand aghast and shocked—I'm no better than an outcast myself, because though I've never fallen in love with anybody in my life and have felt frightened of men and their greediness, I fully sympathise with a friendship like Phil's and Andrée's, and can understand them loving each other?"

"Yes, thank God, there are only a few, a degenerate few, that feel as you do," said Miss Macdonald warmly.

"Then that being so, alone I shall stand."

"You mean you'll do nothing? You'll have her, have them here?"

"They are my friends."

"Then there is no more that I can say. I shall have to leave you to-day. We are obviously poles apart. I can only say I am disappointed in you, disgusted. I might even say dishonoured."

"I'm sorry." Vivian bent her head, she felt very tired. It was as though she had been through a battle, a battle in a civil war, that neither side had won. She certainly felt no elation—and very little regret.

VII

In September Virginia Clare's novel was published. It was a success, and the critics praised it highly.

Vivian saw a copy of *The Road* hanging up in the windows of Smith's one day when she was in Exeter. She immediately bought it. Virginia Clare wrote like a man—and her prose was beautiful in its simplicity. *The Road* was a powerful story—sad without being sordid, hard without cynicism. An undercurrent of tragedy ran through it—one felt its author had known sorrow to the depths, yet had remained free from bitterness.

Vivian closed the book. It was well past midnight. She stretched her arm out to put out the light beside her bed. As she did so she knocked another book off the table. It lay, face downwards on the floor. She bent and picked it up. It was her *Imitation*. She noticed it had fallen and opened at the page ' Love watcheth, and sleeping slumbereth not, weary is not tired, straitened is not constrained, frightened is not disturbed, but like a living flame and a burning torch bursts forth upwards and safely surpasses all. Whosoever loves knoweth the cry of this voice.' There was something in the whole of the passage of à Kempis that reminded her of Virginia Clare. A sense of bravery behind everything. That ' Whosoever loves knoweth this cry '—Vivian herself knew no like cry. She wished she did—it would be something to live for in a way.

Looking at her life Vivian was struck by its uselessness. She was not even justifying her existence. Of course lots

of girls situated as she was would give their time, or part of it, to good works, to charitable organisations, girls' clubs, Guides. . . . Yet would they? She knew nobody of her own age who had been left alone in the world with nearly £4000 a year—away from towns, from places where it became easy to minister to people less lucky than themselves. Anyone she did know, girls in her own neighbourhood, her own class, spent their whole time in enjoyment—hunting, and hunt balls in the winter—tennis parties, river parties, polo, swimming in the summer. It wasn't her fault she was neither married nor ever likely to be. Love! 'Whosoever loves' . . . It didn't matter the object surely, as long as one did love. Someone, something. Yet according to Miss Macdonald it apparently mattered quite a lot.

Miss Macdonald. Vivian had loved her once. Sometimes she regretted their quarrel. She had looked upon Flora Macdonald as a friend—almost as a mother—and as such had expected her confidence, trust, understanding. She supposed it was not the fault of either if they disagreed on some point, no matter how vital. 'To thine own self be true. . . .' Vivian felt that in this case she had had to stand—even if it meant standing alone. She never wrote to Miss Macdonald now. The older woman had written her that as long as Vivian held to ideas so obnoxious, she would rather not have anything more to do with her. 'But rest assured that I shall pray daily for you, poor child—for I really consider you are more sinned against than sinning, and may the devil soon be robbed of the conquest he has made.'

What banality, thought Vivian—more sinned against than sinning. Because she had stuck up for Phil. And anyway, Miss Macdonald's prying, reading other people's letters in Vivian's house, was completely inexcusable.

Hadn't Christ himself preached, 'Let him who is without sin among you cast the first stone'? But perhaps Miss Macdonald was sinless—in her own eyes! Everything was a matter of comparison, after all. She turned the light off. Funny the way Virginia Clare interested her. Funny the way she seemed to crop up on her horizon from time to time, only to disappear again.

One day Vivian was looking through some old boxes and papers of her father's. Tucked away in a case she came across an old signet ring. She tried it on. Much too big for any of her fingers, of course. She had no rings of her own—jewellery had never appealed to her. But a signet ring . . . she felt she would like to have it altered to fit her. Something her father must have worn, too. It would be a trade-mark of her independence. She had to go to Taunton—to some trials. She would take it there and have it fixed.

On a Thursday morning she set off in the car, reaching Taunton at midday. The trials took place in the afternoon. Vivian lunched on sandwiches, and planned to leave Little Wynchcombe about seven o'clock, getting home a little after nine o'clock. She had not gone for more than eight miles when a tyre punctured. The little village of Twinnerton was only about one mile further—she decided to push on and take the car to a garage. Perhaps she could get dinner there, too. She made her way to the 'Three Bells'—an attractive-looking inn. There seemed no one about; she rang the bell. Presently a young and harassed-looking woman came to the door.

"I've had a puncture. I wonder if you could tell me if there's a garage near by—I stupidly came without tools, and I'm not carrying a spare wheel." The woman looked doubtful. "Perhaps I could have some dinner here?"

"Can't let you have anything hot," said the woman hurriedly, "nor can I put you up. Just let me only room."

"Oh, that's all right," said Vivian cheerfully. "I'm on my way to Dulbridge; been to the trials near Taunton. And a piece of ham or a fried egg and bacon will do me all right."

"Oh, I can manage that," said the woman.

"What about the car—have you a husband or someone who could show me the way?" Vivian enquired.

"If you wouldn't mind waiting a few minutes," the woman began apologetically, "my 'usband has rather difficult customers in the bar at the moment."

Vivian got out of the car and went inside. Having washed, she found her way to the coffee-room, her eggs and glass of beer were already waiting for her. There was only one other occupant in the room, a woman, sitting in the other corner of the room, her back turned to Vivian. She had not been eating for long when there was a sound of commotion outside. She listened. Evidently the 'difficult customer' had reached the landlord's limit of endurance and was being shown from the building.

Presently the sounds of shouts and oaths came to her ears. She got up and went to the window—outside in the street was a large, powerful man—drunk as a lord. He was swaying from side to side, cursing everyone at the top of his voice. A crowd collected—the man's attitude at once became brutal and overbearing. The villagers were frightened, terrified—and no wonder, Vivian thought. A worse-looking rogue she had never seen. She heard the landlady enter the room.

"Oh, isn't he awful!" she whispered, "and my 'usband can't do nothing with him. He's just threatening everyone."

"What is he, and what's he so angry about?" asked Vivian.

"He's just a roadster, what we calls—a tramp, you know.

He's a scissors grinder. My 'usband won't serve him out with no more drinks, that's what's made him so wild. I wouldn't go too near the winder if I were you, he might turn nasty."

" Well, I hope he doesn't hurt the car," laughed Vivian nervously.

The arguments outside were getting louder. It was evident that nothing but a stand-up fist-to-fist fight would satisfy the man. His shirt-sleeves were rolled to the elbow, he lurched from one leg to another, the men among the onlookers drew back one by one. He kept shouting for ' The Governor.'

" Isn't there a policeman ? " asked Vivian.

" Not for two miles," cried the distraught woman, " he's been sent for."

" Have you telephoned for him ? "

" My 'usband has got out from the back and gone over to the Vicarage—that's the only telephone there is. And how long that'll be goodness knows. He's only got a push-bike. He's already smashed up a lot of things in the bar, and my 'usband's been cut badly across the face. And he's a little man, he can't stand up to a great brute like that."

" D'you mean to say none of those men out there will do anything ? " asked Vivian indignantly.

" Doesn't seem as though," and the woman started to cry.

Vivian patted her on the shoulder. " There, there, don't you worry. I expect it'll be all right. You go and help your husband inside, and don't worry about us in here. The police will be here soon, I expect."

Vivian left the window and sat down to her eggs and bacon, now turned cold. What a situation ! A quiet English village, at the mercy of one mad drunkard. Presently there was a step in the hall. She saw something

lurch against the glazed glass of the door—it opened gently, the tramp staggered in.

"W'ere's the Gov'ner?" he bellowed. "You tells the bloody gent I wants 'im, see?" and to her amazement he swayed across the room to where the other woman sat alone at her table.

"I don't know where he is," the woman started nervously.

"Yuh don't, eh? Then see to 'ell yuh finds 'im," he hiccoughed loudly. "Pardon me," and he grinned at Vivian, who strolled across the room towards him.

"I say, my man," she started, "you can't come in here like this, you know. We're having dinner, this lady and I."

"Lady, you calls 'er? Well, w'en I asks 'er to fetch the Gov'ner 'er'd better go. See? Or are yer the Queen of England?" and he turned to the other woman with a threatening air.

"You come along out of here," said Vivian, going to the door and opening it wide. Suddenly she heard a cry. Turning swiftly she saw to her horror that the man had his hands on the woman's shoulder—whether to keep himself from falling or whether to assault her she did not stop to think.

"Leave that lady alone at once," she cried, stepping across the room. Something in her arrogant manner infuriated the man.

". . . to you," he shouted, and made for the woman once more.

By this time Vivian saw that he was in deadly earnest and dangerous. She could see, too, that he was so sodden with drink and fury that very little would lay him out. She glanced round and saw a poker in the fender. Quickly she picked it up.

"Get out of here at once," she shouted, "or I'll crack you with this."

The man, to her despair, turned towards her, but did not make any attempt to go. The door was immediately behind him; if she were a man a heavy push would send him hurtling through. But she was only a girl, she knew mere force against him would be worse than useless. Oh, why did no one come? She decided to act at once. Seizing the poker firmly, she strode across the room and flung it with great force at the man's legs. It had not broken them, but he over-balanced. With a yell he tried to rise. Vivian, with masterly presence of mind, rushed to where he leant and pushed him out of the door, quickly bolting it. She had hardly done so when he was up and crashed his fist through the pane of glass.

"Mind out, for heaven's sake!" cried the other woman.

Crash! followed by a third. In a moment the floor was covered with glass and blood, and the man was raving like a maniac, but his strength was leaving him. The crashes of his fist through the windows of the door became less frequent, his oaths and curses more faltering. Then, with a heavy thud, Vivian heard him fall to the floor in collapse. She wiped her forehead, she knew now how frightened she had been, and yet there had been something awfully exciting in it all. Why, she was shaking all over.

"Well, thank goodness that's all over." She turned to her companion with a smile—to her embarrassment she saw the woman suddenly sway, clutch the back of a chair and drop to the floor. "Oh, Lord, a faint," thought Vivian. Really this was too much. She started to giggle almost hysterically. Footsteps were by this time heard running from the staircase into the hall. Men's voices, grunts from the man—someone tried to open the door. Vivian turned the key with trembling fingers. Damn the silly things, she thought, why must they shake so?

"The lady in here has fainted," she called out. "I must give her some water quickly."

"Oh, I am so sorry that this should have happened," began the landlady.

"Never mind that," said Vivian, pouring out some water quickly. She ran back into the room and knelt down beside the fainting woman. Putting one arm beneath her she tried to raise her. It was difficult—fainting women are heavy. Vivian thought how ridiculous it was when in stories knight-errants arrived on such scenes, only to find the 'precious burden as light as a feather.' This woman was more like a ton of coals, thought Vivian hopelessly.

"Can't one of you over there doing nothing help me? Can't you see this lady's fainted?"

Somebody came across, and after a series of puffs and grunts they got the woman into a chair.

"Push 'er 'ead down! Push 'er 'ead between 'er legs. Go on."

It was getting dark. Vivian could by this time hardly see the poor creature. There was a slight flutter of breath coming from her, however. She stirred.

"Here, drink this," Vivian urged. "It's all right, you just fainted. Lean back, I've got you—and do sip this." Then, turning to the manager's wife: "Can't we have a light?"

The fainting woman made an effort to raise herself—her hat fell off. Someone brought the lamp in.

"Feeling better?" Vivian asked sympathetically, and turned to the woman. Then she caught her breath—it was Virginia Clare.

Vivian had no time to say anything. The constable arrived, and she was asked to step outside and give what evidence she could. She told the story unhesitatingly from beginning to end—she saw that she impressed the

man, and when it came to the wielding of the poker he looked at her with real admiration.

"And you didn't even think of 'ow you might 'ave killed 'im?" he asked with relish, eyes growing.

"I did—that's why I saw to it that I biffed him in the legs," said Vivian earnestly.

"Nice lot you all are," he said, turning to the crowd of gaping villagers that clustered by the door. "Ain't there a man among you that this young lady 'ere 'as to give 'im wot for?" After about ten minutes of cross-questioning —her name, address, references seemed to impress him— the police constable told Vivian she could go.

"And if you're wanted at all we shall let you know," he added grandly.

Vivian went back to the other room. Her car! She had forgotten it. Obviously it was too late now to hope for any help from a garage. What could she do? It was dark, and only one room in the inn, and that gone. She returned to the coffee-room. Virginia Clare had recovered.

"I must thank you for being such a brick." She spoke in a husky voice. "I can't think why I was such a fool. I suppose I was tired. I'd driven from London, and he was rather a brute, wasn't he?"

Vivian stammered something incoherently.

"I simply loathe the idea of staying here alone all night," she added, "or are you going to be here, too?"

"I don't quite know what I shall do," said Vivian, offering her a cigarette. "My car's broken down—I've not very many miles to go really, but I don't suppose they'll do it for me now. And anyway, they haven't got another room."

There was a pause.

"Where are you going?" Vivian asked.

"Cornwall. I started rather late—I'd hoped to get as

far as Exeter, but when I realised how far it was I thought I'd just stop at the first attractive-looking place that seemed possible. Never guessed I'd get let in for this sort of a brawl."

"I hope he didn't hurt you? I didn't say too much to the policeman about you when he was cross-questioning me—because there's something so sordid about being the victim of a drunken assault, isn't there?" She laughed.

"Thank you. It was very kind of you. You've saved my life anyway," and she smiled across at Vivian. Vivian looked at her. She looked much older than when she had seen her—that one and only time—in school chapel. But then that was quite a long time ago. She looked older than Smack's picture of her, too. Her hair was the same, though—still that halo of flame. She stood up. She was tall, but not as tall as Vivian. There are some people who will always be girls, who at forty still have a boyish figure, a youthful look. Vivian was such. Virginia Clare, young as she was—she was about thirty-three—was a woman. She was slim, she was of the athlete's build, yet no one would have thought of describing her as a girl. Perhaps it was her full throat, perhaps it was her rather ample bosom. Vivian, looking at her, thought she looked like a very slim *prima donna*. And there was something proud, majestic in the way she held her head. She bent down and picked up her green felt hat that had fallen to the floor. She stuck it on her head, cramming it down cowboy fashion.

"Well," she started, fastening the belt of her leather coat, "whether I pay for a night's lodging I don't mind. But nothing's going to make me stay here. So you can have my room if your car's not done, if you're brave enough to face it." Vivian thought for a minute. It would be rather an anti-climax.

"Where will you go?" she asked.

"I don't know—push on to a bigger place." Vivian caught her breath. After all, why not . . .?

"I say—my name's Vivian Osborne. I live only about twenty miles from here. Why not come and stay the night with me? I could put you up easily, and really it's not out of your way if you're going to Cornwall."

Virginia Clare looked at Vivian and smiled. She liked the look of the girl. But could one do that sort of thing? Chance it.

"It's terribly kind of you. My name's Mrs. Bird."

Vivian started. But of course, how idiotic of her to forget. Guy's wife. She couldn't think of Virginia Clare as belonging to anybody—exchanging her name for someone else's. The name didn't suit her at all.

They went to the proprietor and explained. The woman was very nice, quite understood and charged them for their dinner only.

They arranged that Virginia Clare should drive them to Dulbridge in her car, and that Vivian would send over for hers some time next day.

"I read your book," Vivian said rather shyly, "it was wonderful."

Virginia Clare looked surprised. She knew she had only given Guy's name.

"Haven't you made a mistake?"

"You're Virginia Clare," Vivian stated the fact more than asking a question.

"Yes, but how on earth did you know?"

"I nearly knocked you over when I was confirmed."

Virginia Clare looked bewildered. What was this extraordinary girl talking about? Then Vivian told her. How she had seen her, been interested in her, seen her picture so by chance in the Academy. Then she had read

her book. And now this strange meeting. She only omitted any knowledge of her marriage, of Guy, of Phil.

Both Virginia Clare and Vivian were tired when they reached Dulbridge. Both of them had hot baths and then went to bed. Next morning at breakfast Virginia Clare said she must be off early as she still had a longish way to motor.

"Do you know Cornwall at all?" she asked Vivian.

"No, I can't say I do," Vivian said.

"I've got a cottage, only a tiny place, at Polkerris. I used to live in Cornwall when I was a child. But I never went back till about a year ago. I adore it. I expect I shall be there a good deal now."

"Are you there with your husband?"

"No. I don't live with my husband. I've a little boy. He's two years old. I'm going down there to him. I've always done the journey by train before."

"I wish you would break your journey here whenever you feel like it," said Vivian. "And bring your little boy, too. I should love it. I'm nearly always here—and if you sent me a post card——"

"How very kind you are."

"What's your little boy's name?" asked Vivian.

"Michael. I've got a snapshot of him in my bag, not a very good one, but still——" She opened her bag and drew out a faded photograph.

"What a duck," exclaimed Vivian.

"Are you fond of children?" asked Virginia Clare.

"I don't know any. I think I should adore them. Specially little boys. I've never had brothers or sisters. I went to school when I was pretty old, none of my friends have had children. Funny, now I come to think of it I expect they're pretty much the same as dogs."

Virginia Clare smiled wistfully.

"I used to think so. I love animals. Always have done. I had the most glorious golden setter once, his name was Druid. When he died I was so miserable I felt I could never have another dog. I just adored him. Then I married, and Michael was born. My marriage hasn't been a happy one, I'm afraid. But everything has been worth Michael, he's my life, I worship him more than anything in the world."

"How lovely," said Vivian enviously.

"Yes, I suppose it is. But should one love things like that? It's ghastly how dependent on them one becomes. Sometimes I wake up in the night and think that he's been kidnapped or something equally absurd and terrifying. And it's so frightening. I never feel at ease, you know, when I'm not with him. No, it's a mistake, but I'm made like that. I only wish I wasn't. And when I was young I didn't care a hang for children, never wanted any of my own."

"How is it you've left him now?" Vivian asked.

"I simply had to go up to London to see my publisher." They moved into the other room.

"Have a cigarette before you go," said Vivian.

"Hullo! That's a photograph of Miss Macdonald." Virginia Clare picked up the frame and looked into it. "Were you very fond of her?" she asked.

"Yes, terribly," Vivian replied.

"I used to be, too. Then we drifted apart—like people do. Do you still see her? Do give her my love and ask her if she remembers me."

Vivian paused a second before replying. "As a matter of fact we had rather a bad row. At present we don't write to each other."

"Oh!" Virginia Clare changed the subject. About an hour later she left Dulbridge. Vivian watched her go—

the old Morris turned the corner, Virginia Clare waved a hand, and was gone. Vivian strolled across a field, down to the stream. She felt empty. The place seemed empty. She realised how lonely she was, what a lonely life she led. No one to talk to, to laugh with. The servants . . . yes, but . . . It was ridiculous at her age. But she had never felt quite like this before.

Should she adopt a child? She nearly laughed aloud at the thought. What on earth would she do with a child? Virginia Clare said she hadn't wanted children. But look how she worshipped this Michael of hers. But it was her own, her own flesh and blood. Virginia Clare looked as if she would be a lovely mother. There was something Madonna-like about her. Vivian pictured her romping on the sands with him, picking up shells and being really interested in them. She was the sort of woman who would pick up her baby impulsively and kiss him all over.

Vivian had no maternal instincts. She would be kind, she would love to play with children, but older children; and she would join in their games as one of themselves. Little children, babies, would frighten her, embarrass her. Virginia Clare would be different, she knew. Virginia Clare would play with them, invent marvellous fairy stories for them, sea yarns for Michael when he was older, of pirates' and smugglers' caves. She would probably sit up all night doing difficult sums in order that her child should not be bottom of his form at school the next day. She would be a grand friend to her child. And she would be the same with a baby. Tender, efficient, but passionately possessive. Vivian could imagine some small curly head nestling in those arms, against her breasts.

Virginia Clare! Virginia Clare! Virginia Clare! Couldn't she stop thinking about her? A motor horn sounded in the distance. Vivian's heart missed a beat.

Could it possibly be Virginia Clare returning, having forgotten something? The motor horn sounded again further away this time. She was becoming maudlin, she told herself. She left the stream and went back to the house. She fetched tools and tried to do some gardening. There was plenty of weeding to be done by the dahlias. But she kept thinking of Virginia Clare and her green eyes, such sad eyes, and her halo of flaming hair.

She thought of Guy Bird. Why did that man always have to hurt his women? What a brute, how she would like to take a poker to him, she thought. Just as she had to the drunken tramp last night. First he'd broken Phil, and now his wife. It was all wrong to be left alone like that, with a baby, and no one to look after her.

The gong went for lunch. She took a library book off a shelf and tried to read. Rotten stuff, after *The Road*. There she was again. Why this obsession—why—why?

She went upstairs—outside the spare room she paused. There was a faint scent—honeysuckle. Vivian stood and sniffed. Yes, it was the scent she had worn. How it clung. Blessed scent. She went into the room and closed the window—it might preserve it still longer. Something had fallen on the floor. It was a crumpled handkerchief. Vivian picked it up. Yes, there were the initials in the corner; V.C.B. Virginia Clare Bird. Why Bird? He had no place in her life at all really. She felt a tremendous relief when she realised that Virginia Clare was alone, that Guy Bird was nothing to her. Was that true, though? She might adore him still, for all she knew. No, impossible. Michael was enough for her. Even Michael—but she could not grudge her her nice fat, curly-haired Michael. She was right to have a baby, just one. Perhaps she loved somebody else, though. That was unlikely; or why those sad eyes? She was alone in Polkerris taking care of Michael

Someone should be taking care of her as well. Suddenly a sentence of Phil's rose to her, something to do with Andrée. "I flatter myself I can take care of her as well as any man." As well as any man . . . as well as . . . and better, probably. Oh, God ! . . . but she was mad, mad. She drew the handkerchief from her pocket. What should she do with it? Keep it, guarded jealously like some rare jewel? Or send it to her as an excuse for writing? Yes, that was the thing to do. Then Virginia might write and thank her, and she would keep the precious letter instead. She sat down, and seized the pen, and then she remembered that she had simply no idea of Virginia Clare's address. Polkerris. She wasn't even sure if it was Polkerris itself. It was no good, not worth the risk. She would probably never see her again. Virginia Clare would not write to her, why should she? She had probably found her a bore, anyway. She hadn't been very entertaining.

Suddenly, for the first time in her life, Vivian burst into tears.

VIII

THREE days later Vivian received a letter in unknown writing. The postmark was indecipherable. She opened it and her heart stopped beating for a minute when she saw the signature.

'DEAR MISS OSBORNE,' it ran,

'It was more kind of you than you know to rescue me the other evening. Thank you so much, both for your life-saving gesture and for the charming hospitality I received from you at your sweet cottage. As I motored on from you I soon realised how difficult I should have found it looking for a night's lodging, if you had not so kindly stepped in with your offer. I found Michael very well and happy, and am overjoyed to be back with him. If you ever think of coming down to this part of the country, do come and look me up and stay a night or two. It's all rather primitive and very quiet, but I should enjoy having you very much, and I think you would love Cornwall.

'Yours sincerely,

'VIRGINIA CLARE BIRD.'

Vivian read the letter over twice. She had to motor to Dulverton for lunch, and while she was waiting outside a shop in the town she took it out of her bag and read it once more. She was excited, happy; she felt she would surely see Virginia Clare again.

Before turning the light out in bed that night she read the letter over for a fourth time. She knew it by heart now. Nothing, as letters go, but then there had been really no necessity for Virginia Clare to write.

Next day she took down a road map. It was a long time before she could find Polkerris, marked so finely, in a small corner. Why not go for a motor tour round Cornwall? She had never been, the country was glorious at this time. And then, what a goal. . . . She would make first of all for Tintagel, and St. Ives. Then cut across the mainland to the Lizard. She'd always wanted to see that part. Then stay a couple of nights perhaps on the Helford River, and then Polkerris. That would make a trip of ten days or so, staying a few days in each place. And she loved nothing more than to be off in the Renault alone, no one to bother about, her own mistress entirely. Yes, it was a great idea.

. . . . . .

She was enchanted by Cornwall. Medieval romance still seemed to cling to the place. The great barren rocks and cliffs on the north coast, unshakable bastions against which the waves of the Atlantic beat and thundered. She could imagine Arthur and his knights slowly making their way across the country-side. Then the plains, ugly stretches of land, sometimes with no roof to be seen for miles but a tumbledown ruin of some cottage. Arthur had fought his battles here against Duke Gaulois. Here, too, King Mark had lived and kept the fair Iseult. The place was alive with spirits and ancient lore.

She crossed the mainland from St. Ives to Helston. The bleakness inland did not worry her. A feeling of exhilaration passed through her as she tore through the country, her hat off and the wind blowing her hair. It was so high,

so different from any other part of England she knew. She could see for miles and miles. Those little white hills like pyramids in the distance every now and then; would they be salt mines, or tin mines, or china clay? It was exciting, this rushing through a part of England that seemed so foreign. And the low white walls, with no hedges anywhere. And the funny stone stiles. The people, too, were different; different in their voices, in their looks.

The country round the Lizard made her catch her breath. She had not dreamt such beauty existed so near her. She had adored Scotland, revelled in the mystery of Skye, but this strange Cornwall had a beauty all its own. And the sea was blue as any Mediterranean. Vivian made her way to the vast stretches of sand, silver and gold like a miniature Sahara. There was no one about. She thanked the stars that English people were unpatriotic about such beauty spots as this. There were cattle on the sands, large comfortable-looking beasts that took not the slightest notice of her as she meandered by. The rocks seemed endless each end of this bay, great crags that stood like sentinels from the sea. It was like a deserted Eden, superb in its beauty and grandeur.

Vivian stayed in this part for nearly a week. She could not tear herself away. She put up at a farm-house that had been the headquarters of a monastery in years gone by. Its stone walls were battered and ageless, the roof tiled with old Cornish slate, moss-covered and lichened. There were ruins of an old pre-Norman church near by. The peace and quiet seemed unbelievable. She never saw anybody; even the few thatched cottages near by seemed asleep and uninhabited. All day long she lay on the sands, or climbed the rocks and cliffs. The hot September sun beat upon her till she blackened like a negro. It was

unnecessary to wear a bathing-dress. She would spend hours in the open sea, with its great surf falling on her and knocking her almost senseless, or in little green pools hot like Australian geyser water, and watched the reflection of her bare limbs. There was no one to see her but the cattle, and no sound but the screaming of the gulls as they wheeled above her, and the clanging of the surf as it met the shore.

Then she remembered her quest, the reason of her coming to Cornwall. She must push on. Round the Helford district amazement settled upon her once more. Here was fresh beauty of a completely different kind. Warm and tropical it seemed, with trees, plants and flowers that she had hitherto imagined grew only many hundreds of miles from England. Oh, what a land! She felt there was only one thing to do; give up Dulbridge and bury herself for ever in this Cornwall. She went on to Falmouth, but that was big, and though the river and country near by were beautiful, the place seemed more ordinary to her. She wrote to Virginia Clare: "Am motoring through Cornwall. Cannot believe such beauty can be true. Can I come and see you? Vivian Osborne." The following afternoon a telegram came: "Expecting you to-morrow. Stay a night or as long as you like."

. . . . . .

Away off the main road, down twisting turnings, at the foot of a lane so steep that Vivian thought she would never be able to drive the car up it again, lay Polkerris. Just a straggling lane, a handful of cottages, a miniature harbour which was not much more than a stone landing-place, silver sands and slate rock and a great wide bay. There seemed to be no shops, just one inn, a few bare-headed and bare-legged inhabitants; and peace.

Virginia Clare's cottage stood on the village street. It was old and grey, with roses and clematis creeping over the walls, a wisteria, the blooms now dead and faded, and over the porch a bower of honeysuckle. Virginia Clare ran out to meet her.

"What fun to see you!" she exclaimed. "Come in and have some tea; it won't take a second and I'm sure you'd like a cup."

The cottage was as attractive inside as out. There was a low tiled living-room, rather dark, with an open fireplace; smoked beams supported the ceiling. An old Cumberland dresser stood in one corner of the room, hung with pewter and Willow pattern. A bowl full of roses that stood on the table gave scent to the whole room. There were Toby jugs filled with sweet peas and pinks, and in the corner a tall pitcher stacked with delphiniums. The window, with its chintz curtains and window-seat, looked out on the little street. There was a door at the far end of the room which led out into the garden.

"What an enchanting place," breathed Vivian, "and how like you."

"I'm so glad you think it's attractive," said Virginia Clare. "Some people would say it was poky, of course, but I adore it. It's very primitive, as I told you—no electricity, just lamps and candles, and the bath, such as it is, is outside the kitchen! Come and look at the garden."

It was not big, but a blaze of colour greeted Vivian. Herbaceous stuff of every kind—great masses of gladioli, old-fashioned sweet williams, Canterbury bells and roses everywhere.

"Oh, I do love it," she exclaimed. "No wonder you don't feel like living anywhere else. But I've never seen such a place as Cornwall, anyway. I shall have to leave Dulbridge, beautiful as it is, and come to these parts. It's

all so unexpected, isn't it? I mean, one keeps coming across things, only a few miles apart, that seem to belong to different countries almost."

"Yes, I feel like that about it. But then I can't bear city life."

"I get awfully fed up with it," said Vivian, "if I stay there for long. I used to think I'd love to live in Scotland, but there's something almost too big about the grandness up there."

"Come and see your room," said Virginia Clare. She led the way up the little staircase, into a tiny room that looked across the garden. The floor was uneven, covered with rush matting. There was a narrow four-poster bed, on which lay a patchwork quilt. The whole room seemed to smell of wild thyme and hay. "You can just catch a glimpse of the sea."

"Where is Michael?" Vivian asked.

"I've put him to bed. I don't let him stay up after six o'clock, anyway, and I didn't think it would hurt him to go a wee bit earlier to-night. Come and have a peep at him."

She led the way into her own room. Beside her own divan was a fairly large old Dutch oak cot. Michael lay inside it. Vivian tip-toed to look at him. He was a beautiful little thing, his head clustered with auburn curls, his pale skin delicately freckled. He turned round as the two women approached. He reminded Vivian very much of Virginia Clare, except that his eyes were blue—like two speedwells, she thought—and hers were so very green.

"Go to sleep, my precious," whispered Virginia Clare, bending down to kiss him. He stretched out his arms and hugged her.

"Come down and have your tea, and then I'll take you on to the beach. It's rather heavenly this time of evening—the Mevagissey fishing fleet start out across the bay,

and there'll probably be a glorious sunset later on. You might even like a bathe before supper."

Presently they wandered out towards the sea. The tide was nearly in, the sea looked like hammered silver. Across the bay the headland in the far distance stood out black against the sky; the sun would soon sink behind the hills, and the little smacks that would start casting their nets for their evening's work. A schooner in full sail came in sight from beyond the point. Everything was quiet, there was no one on the little beach at all, just themselves, and a spaniel rolling with a mongrel sheepdog.

The two women bathed—the water was quite warm from the September sun—and they were able to dive from the top of the jetty. Virginia Clare took a header, Vivian followed with a swallow dive.

"Jove! that's marvellous, isn't it," she cried as she came up. Virginia Clare was treading water near.

"I think this is the best time of day to go in," she said; "race you to that point and back." She turned and started off, with powerful man-like strokes.

After supper they went out into the garden and sat on the hammock. The sun was down now, the glow still remained. An almost Eastern sky. . . . Vivian could not speak for happiness. The sky turned from gold and crimson to purple, green, blue. One tiny star was shining. The half-moon was trying to push its way from behind a small heat cloud. A bat swooped down and nearly touched them. Somewhere near, a bull-frog croaked, there was a faint buzzing from behind the wall—crickets, perhaps? The aroma of the tobacco plants filled the air with its pungent sweetness; an owl started to hoot.

"I do think it was marvellous of you to ask me," Vivian began.

"Why?" asked Virginia Clare, laughing. "I wanted

to see you again. Much as I adore it down here I'm sometimes rather lonely, and though many people would think it impulsive, absurd perhaps, I felt you and I might be friends."

"Did you really, Mrs. Bird?" said Vivian, catching her breath.

"But you mustn't call me Mrs. Bird. It's a horrible name, anyway."

"I always think of you simply as Virginia Clare. I don't think just as Virginia you'd seem right, somehow."

"Hardly anyone does call me Virginia. My husband does, did; my family used to. Most people call me V.C."

"No, I hate that. Sounds like a medal." Virginia Clare laughed. Vivian thought a while. "Can I call you just Clare?" she asked.

"Yes, of course, if you like."

They talked. Virginia Clare asked Vivian about her life, what she did with herself, her friends. She told her she had written another book, of short stories this time.

"That's why I can have you with me. I'm resting for a bit. I can't manage people when I'm working."

"When will they be out?" asked Vivian.

"Oh, not till the spring. I've got all the script upstairs, waiting to be corrected. That's a tedious business."

"What do you have to do?" Vivian asked.

"Oh, just correct the spelling and typing errors, etc., quite easy, really, but dull when you've done it all before."

"Couldn't I help you to do it?"

"My dear! What a godsend you'd be. Will you really?"

"Why, I'd do anything for you," she exclaimed.

Virginia Clare looked surprised.

"How sweet of you! Why are you so nice to me?"

"I can take it back with me and work on it at home," began Vivian, hurriedly.

"Oh, no, you'll have to stay here. I shan't let you go home yet, you know. You don't have to, I'm sure."

"But you won't want me——"

"Nonsense! I know I'm going to love having you, and we'll have great fun. I shall take a complete holiday and behave outrageously, and bathe and fish, and walk, and lord knows what," she laughed.

They went indoors about ten o'clock. Clare lit the lamp and took a cigarette. Her eyes wandered round the room, resting on well-loved objects. Presently they fell on a photograph of Michael. She sighed. She looked up and saw Vivian looking at her.

"What are you thinking about?" she asked.

"You," said Vivian.

"What about me?" enquired Clare.

"I—you'd think it impertinent if I told you."

"No, I shouldn't. Tell me. Please."

"I was—wondering why your eyes are so terribly sad?" she said, slowly. Clare's forehead clouded. In most people she would have resented the question, looked upon it as cheek. Something about Vivian's sincerity made this impossible.

"Oh, my dear, don't worry about me. I'm not sad, my eyes are lying," but Vivian knew she was not speaking the truth.

"Come on, we'd better go up to bed," said Clare.

Outside their rooms she stopped. "Got everything you want?" she asked.

"Yes, thank you. Don't be annoyed, will you, by what I said? It's only that—well, never mind."

"Of course I'm not annoyed, Vivian. I think it's rather nice of you to bother about it, anyhow. I'm all right; I'll tell you little bits and pieces some time, I daresay. Sometimes it's a bit hard when there's not a soul that cares

a damn. I don't know why I'm saying this to you when I hardly know you. Perhaps that's the reason."

"I want you to know, Clare, that there's nothing I wouldn't do for you. If you want to tell me things I should treat any confidence of yours as precious. If you don't want to, then please don't. I don't want you to think that because I'm your friend you must."

"My friend?" asked Clare.

. . . . . .

Vivian took Michael on to the beach to play. She had never known a small child before. His movements, his quiet little games, his conscientiousness, his staggering backwards and forwards to the sea to fill his pail intrigued her, fascinated her.

"Michael, come here, come and talk to me." He never took any notice at all. Yet when he turned and saw her he would smile and stretch out his arms, and wave. She thought what a good little thing he was, but quiet compared to the three or four other rowdy creatures, screaming and yelling at the tops of their voices. Presently Clare joined them on the sands.

"How good he is, Clare," smiled Vivian. "Seems to amuse himself so well—and never makes a sound."

Clare was silent. Vivian turned to look at her—she saw that her eyes were filled with tears.

"What's the matter, my dear, what is it?"

"I thought perhaps you would guess—you see, he can't help being quiet, my baby——" She caught him to her and kissed his curls, his little hands, the back of his neck. Then she let him down quickly and he scrambled off. "Vivian, he's—he's deaf and dumb." She turned away.

"Oh—darling." Vivian was speechless. Then, "I didn't know, of course I didn't," she said. "But he's

so young, so tiny yet—are you certain? Are you sure it isn't just that he's backward?"

"No, no." Clare spoke tonelessly. "You see, he can't hear a thing either. Oh, my dear, don't think I haven't said over and over 'it can't be, it can't be.' I took him to doctors, specialists, only a few months ago. They say he's quite stone-deaf—nothing can be done. And he's such a darling, so good, untroublesome, it breaks my heart if I think too much about it."

"Poor Clare." Useless words, what hope, what comfort in them?

. . . . . .

Vivian's love for Clare grew daily. She admired her, too. She was courageous, never saying a word against Guy, never pleading poverty, yet Vivian realised that she had practically no money but what she earned herself. Always so bright and cheerful with Michael, laughing with him, playing with him, so patient when he seemed unable to understand things. Vivian loved to think she was being of some use to her. She read the script of her stories, correcting them and re-correcting them. Only once did Virginia Clare break down. It was on the tenth evening of Vivian's visit. Vivian had been out since the middle of the afternoon, fishing. Clare had stayed at home on the plea of getting an article finished. It was about half-past seven when Vivian came in, Michael had been put to bed some time ago, Clare was nowhere to be seen. Vivian searched the garden, she wasn't there, nor in her own room with Michael, nor the living-room. Thinking she must have gone for a stroll to the village, Vivian went up to her own room to change her wet clothes before supper. To her surprise she found Virginia Clare lying on her bed. Her face was drawn, she looked in pain.

"Clare, are you ill?" Vivian bent over her. "Tell me. It's me, Vivian." Clare opened her eyes, and put her hand on her forehead.

"Sorry to be in here, Vivian, dear. I've got such a frantic head. I feel all in."

Vivian went to the dressing-table, took out a handkerchief, and dipped it in eau-de-Cologne.

"My room's so hot and I don't want to be in there with Michael. It's so light outside, and the sofa downstairs isn't too comfy to lie on. D'you mind terribly my coming here?"

"Of course not." She laid the cold handkerchief on Clare's head.

"Oh, how lovely that is," murmured Clare.

"Just you lie there. I'll go and have something to eat, and come up again very soon. Perhaps you'll sleep. Anything you'd like me to get you?" she asked, sympathetically.

Clare shook her head. Vivian went downstairs. She wasn't really very hungry, but she knew Clare would have fussed if she had refused supper. Poor angel, she did look rotten. It was ridiculous to think she had no one really to look after her. There was Mrs. Thomas, of course, but she went every evening at seven o'clock. Even a girl in the house would be better than nothing. Supposing she was ever really taken ill in the night. All alone, with Michael.

Vivian thought of Guy, where was he? What had been the cause of their separation? Clare never spoke about him, and she hadn't liked to ask. She knew that she hated the idea of her leaving Polkerris. She had said so, frankly. Several days ago Vivian had said:

"Don't you think it's time I went?"

"Oh, must you?" Clare had said, in a voice ringing with disappointment. "If you only knew what it's been like, having you."

"I don't want to go," Vivian had said, "but I felt you'd had about enough of me by now."

"Oh, my dear! Don't be so silly. Please, please don't think about going yet. You say you love being here, believe me not half as much as I love having you. You're so restful, so easy, so understanding. And you do spoil me so much," she added, laughing, "no one has ever been as kind to me as you are, always doing things for me, helping me in so many ways! I shall feel like I did after the monthly nurse left me when I had Michael, if you go yet."

"I won't leave you," Vivian had said.

After supper she crept upstairs again. Clare turned as she came in.

"Feeling better?" Clare shook her head.

"It's each side that hurts so terribly. By the temples, I think. Here and here." She put her hand to her forehead, her thumb and finger touching the place.

"Lie still, darling, and I'll see if I can massage it for you." Vivian sat on the side of the bed. Very carefully, very gently, her fingers rubbed, pushed, massaged.

"How's that?" she asked later.

"Wonderful," breathed Clare. "It still aches, but that's helping wonderfully.

For two hours Vivian sat in a cramped position, and never stopped for a minute. Clare had fallen to sleep long before this, but it did not occur to Vivian to leave off. She would willingly have sat up all night.

It was nearly midnight when Clare woke.

"Good heavens! You're not still bothering about me, are you?" She turned and looked at Vivian in astonishment.

"You didn't think I was going to leave you, did you?"

"Poor darling, and I've got your bed, so you couldn't get to sleep, could you? What a selfish beast I am."

"Don't talk rot."

"Shall I have a peep and see if Michael is all right?" she asked.

"Do, like a lamb."

"Sleeping like a top," she whispered a minute or two later.

"I wonder what gave you such a frightful head," Vivian said a little later, as she sat on the side of the bed.

"Worry—anxiety—hate, if you really want to know."

Vivian looked at Clare and almost fancied she detected the note of fear in her voice. Fear! Fear from calm, brave Virginia Clare?

"This afternoon when you were out I had a letter from Guy," she started hopelessly.

"From your husband?"

"Husband! Yes. He's coming down here."

"Coming here? But I thought you didn't live with him any more?"

"Nor do I. But we aren't legally separated, and you see, he has everything on his side. I left him. It's true he never made any attempt to keep me, nor seemed to mind when I went. But facts are facts and if I refuse to allow him near me when he wishes to come, he can take Michael."

"Surely he wouldn't. What on earth could he want with Michael? A man like him, always on the move, and a baby of Michael's age?"

"Oh, it would only be spite," Clare said rather bitterly. "He's never got over the fact that I walked out on him. He's always given women the chuck before, it was a change, and a blow to his pride, for a woman to leave him."

"What d'you suppose he wants to see you for?" asked Vivian.

"He wants to see me about Michael, so he says. He's been in America, he hasn't seen either of us, since we knew the doctors' verdict on Michael. Funnily enough,

he's very proud of him—I think he imagines he's done something wonderful in creating a son.

" Why did you leave him, Clare ? "

" Because I found out that he had a mistress. I will not share things. It may be narrow, you can call it Victorian if you like, but I will not share a husband. It wasn't that I was jealous—I'm not a jealous person. But I've some pride. And I minded for Michael, too. It infuriated me to know that I was being laughed at behind my back, to know that people thought I was the blind wife."

" Didn't you know what sort of a man he was when you married him ? "

" Yes, that was where I was such a fool. I knew he made love to practically everyone he met. But I also knew he had never married before. I was terribly in love with him, with his mind I think, far more than with his body. When he met me he was living with someone else. I never met her, but he used to say how bored he was getting with her. Apparently she never left him alone. I think he despised her because she offered the other cheek, so to speak, the entire time. I think all women had been his slaves till I came along. And I was determined not to be. I wanted him, but I wanted him to want me most. To be his mistress just the same as the rest of the long queue—no, I told myself that would be fatal. If he really wanted me he would have to make the sacrifice and marry me. I'd never been anyone's mistress, and I didn't see why I should be his. Don't think it was because I'm shocked by that sort of thing. I'm not. But I've always felt that free love or whatever you like to call it is rather second-rate, rather pointless. After all, marriage would never have been instituted—that's what the Prayer Book calls it, isn't it ? —if there had been good enough reason for the other thing. Don't you agree ? "

"Yes, I suppose I do," said Vivian.

"Where I was a fool," Clare continued, "was in thinking he'd give up other women. I ought to have realised——"

"Does he still love you, d'you think?" asked Vivian.

"No. I don't think Guy knows what the word love means. He thought he did, obviously, or he wouldn't have married me. And yet, I don't know—he's extravagant. Would pay the earth if he had it, to get something he really wants. He wanted me and paid—what he imagined was his freedom—to get me. To give him his due, he was completely faithful to start with. I think he first started breaking out again when I was having Michael. I didn't know at the time. I don't really regret it, because he gave me Michael. And I should have been very unhappy if I hadn't married him."

"How much were you in love with him?" Vivian asked, with a tug at her heart.

"Very much. As I told you, I loved his mind. That's where we began, you see. I don't mean this conceitedly, but all Guy's other women had been very inferior to him. It had been physical always. With me it was different; he used to talk 'things.' For ages he talked to me as if I were another man. That flattered me a bit, I suppose—I think he meant it. But later I realised it's the best way a man can flatter a woman. Whether he was being clever, or whether it was a case of fifty-fifty, I don't know. Afterwards he made it pretty clear he was in love with me, but he always treated me as an individual with some intellect, and not just a mere woman." Clare laughed. "Sometimes," she said, "I wish I were different, more like other women. Mental things mean so much more to me than—bodies. Perhaps I miss a lot."

"Don't you care for that sort of thing?" asked Vivian quietly.

Virginia Clare paused before she spoke.

"If I loved someone very much, I love to know I'm making them happy. Guy was a wonderful lover—he used almost to convince me that I was an ordinary woman after all. I was happy knowing that I was giving him something that meant a lot to him."

"And other people?" asked Vivian.

"Other men? I've never let other people love me. As lovers, I mean. You see, I'm a Catholic, and though, as I told you, the actual doing of certain things doesn't seem wrong to me, I feel it's rather mean to lap up all the good things of one's faith, and to ignore the difficult and irksome ones."

"Don't you love your religion, Vivian?" she asked presently.

"Yes," said Vivian thoughtfully. "I suppose it means a good deal to me, really. I feel so sure about it."

"I wonder if you would if you had any very great sorrow? I often wonder if I should still have that safe feeling. It's the beauty, the oldness, the tradition of it that appealed to me originally, I'm afraid."

"But no one can say you've had a particularly happy time, dear. Guy's a rotter, and Michael—well. . . ."

"I've felt it's helped me a lot in both cases. But both those are bearable sorrows. If something worse happened, if anything happened to Michael, do you know, Vivian, I should lose everything."

"No, no, you wouldn't," Vivian said.

"I should. I should never forgive God. . . . I believe I should chuck everything."

"But nothing has happened to Michael, so——"

"I know, I know. But there are times when I wonder if all this isn't just preparing me for something worse."

"But why? Why should you deserve anything worse?"

"Whoever heard of people getting their deserts in this life?" said Clare bitterly.

"Darling, that's hard. And you're becoming very morbid. Anyway, it's time for you to go to bed."

Clare yawned.

"When is Guy arriving?" Vivian asked.

"Oh, in about three days."

"I shall have to go then," Vivian spoke flatly. She saw herself once more plunged into a world of emptiness. And how much emptier now that she realised how much Clare meant to her.

"Oh, my dear, I don't want you to go. I dread the thought of being along with him here."

. . . . . .

"Clare," said Vivian, the following day, "there's something I shall have to tell you. Before your husband arrives."

Clare looked up at her, questioningly.

"I've met Guy," Vivian began.

"What! You know him?" Clare was surprised. "But how funny of you never to have told me before."

"Yes. . . . I don't know why I haven't. Perhaps because until last night you've never spoken very much about him. And I didn't want to bring up something that would make you unhappy, or anything. I only met him once or twice, and I daresay he'll have forgotten."

"How did you know him?" Clare asked.

"Phil Tyler was a very great friend of mine," she began. She saw Clare start. "You know who I mean?"

"Of course. That's the girl Guy chucked to marry me. But what an amazing thing! And how very odd of you not to have told me. Why, there are probably masses of things you know about Guy, things you know as well as I do."

She paused a second. "Tell me about her. D'you still know her well?"

"When I met Guy it was just before Phil finally went off with him. She was terribly in love with him. I was staying in London with her. One night he came to the flat and stayed all night. I was awfully young at the time and was rather shocked by everything. She was a great friend of mine, but I'd never come up against that sort of thing before—in her, or in anyone else. She went away with him soon after that, and I didn't see her again till he'd thrown her over. She was in Monte Carlo. Then I got to know how terribly she had suffered. She was very bitter about him, about all men, in fact. She told me pretty nearly everything. Funnily enough, she never knew who you were, not until we both saw your picture at the Academy, and I recognised you."

"Knowing how badly she'd been treated, and being such a friend of hers, I wonder you didn't dislike me," said Clare.

"Somehow it never struck me. Phil had known from the beginning what a brute he was, and besides she was more or less happy again by that time—she didn't want him any longer. Of course, you're both very different—in your feelings about him, I mean. She'd have gone on taking him back from other women till the cows came home. You said yesterday that his other women were—things, just women, to him. I remember Phil saying the same thing when she was telling me how she'd lost him to you. Yet Phil was by no means a fool. She was clever, intelligent—her paintings were extraordinarily good."

"She was a fool over him," said Clare. "It was her doormat attitude, her frank cheapness that bored him."

"I suppose so," Vivian said. "You see, her actual physical relationship with him meant everything to her.

She was madly in love with——" Vivian stopped. She suddenly realised she was discussing Clare's husband.

" What a pity I haven't her magnanimous spirit." Clare laughed. " Vivian," she turned to the girl, " you know I'm dreading his coming here. Supposing he wants to stay? What am I going to do?"

" D'you think he'll mind if I'm here?" asked Vivian slowly.

" I don't see how he can. What's it to him? Why d'you ask?"

" I was thinking. If it obviously annoys him, pretend that I'm here definitely, it'll drive him off—after a day or two."

Virginia Clare laughed.

" What a marvellous idea," she said.

. . . . . .

Three of them sat in the hammock in the garden—Vivian, Virginia Clare and Guy Bird. It was after supper. Guy had lit his pipe, and Vivian noticed that Clare was smoking more than usual. Otherwise there was nothing to suggest any signs of nervousness, of antagonism at Guy's arrival. He had come late in the afternoon; he showed no annoyance or even surprise when he heard he was to be put up in the inn.

All through supper and during the evening he was amusing, charming. Vivian saw at once his fascination. It seemed unbelievable that he could have made at least two women so miserable.

He had told them amusing stories about his American travels. He told them the outline of a book he was going to start shortly. He praised Clare's novel. Vivian noticed that in all his conversation there seemed to be a calculated ignoring of their sex. He was treating them, talking to

them, as to any other men. Was that his subtle working? Vivian felt suddenly frightened. What if Clare fell once again? Wouldn't it solve, in a way, many problems? And he was her husband. Supposing she felt it was the easiest way? . . .

Suddenly he got up and helped himself to a drink.

"Funny that you should be such a pal of Virginia's," he said.

"Why?" asked Virginia Clare.

"She was Phil's pal, too." Vivian bit her lip.

"I bet you've heard plenty of jolly things about me. D'you ever see Phil now?" he asked.

Vivian glanced at Clare. She did not seem embarrassed.

"Yes," she said. "Sometimes she comes down to me in Devonshire."

"Lord! She doesn't mind running into the old man now, then?"

"You mean her father?"

"M'm. When we were together"—Vivian found herself looking at Clare, expecting her to flinch, but she seemed quite unmoved—"she never would go near him. Who's she with now?"

"She lives with a friend, another woman." Vivian spoke shortly. He looked surprised.

"In whatever capacity?"

"Her name's Andrée de Saarkoff—Baroness de Saarkoff. She's very attractive. And she's been very kind to Phil."

"That woman! Good Lord, I remember they met in Naples. So that's how the land lies, is it? Well, well, well. Poor old Phil, she was always rather erratic."

He yawned.

"Well, Virginia . . . if you don't mind I'll turn in. This place makes me dead sleepy. I should think it's relaxing. Good night, Vivian."

She felt it was a dismissal, and turned towards the cottage.

"My dear, you're as lovely as ever. I'd forgotten how lovely. What a fool I was——" Vivian heard him talking to Clare. A blind fury overtook her. She walked back to where they stood.

"I'd forgotten my book." She picked up the book Clare had been reading, and looked in Clare's eyes. "Coming in, darling?" She put her arm through Clare's; all three strolled indoors. Vivian went to the front door and opened it.

"You'd better go now, while I'm here and can lock up." She spoke quite casually.

IX

"Pity it is when one breaks with friends, isn't it?" Vivian and Clare were sitting on the rocks, Guy was down in the pools helping young Michael to find shells.

"Who are you thinking of?" asked Clare.

"Miss Macdonald. She would have loved this place, and she'd be awfully interested to hear all about you."

"Why don't you write to her? Pretend nothing happened. What did happen, anyway?"

"We just had rather a beastly row, or argument, whichever you like to call it. But it puts writing to her out of the question."

"I can't imagine you getting really angry with anyone, Vivian. Specially someone you loved; and you were very fond of her, weren't you?"

"She was like a mother, in a way. Perhaps more like a very good godmother. It was her fault though."

"Tell me about it."

Vivian hesitated. "It was about Phil, oddly enough."

"Phil? Guy's Phil?"

"Yes. She had always had her knife into her long before she ever met her. Then I had them both to stay. She found out about Phil and Andrée, found out in an unspeakable way, read a letter. We had a terrible scene; I was pretty mad, and a bit nonplussed. I stuck up for both of them, so she said I was as bad, that we were all vicious, and beyond the pale."

"It seems a pity. Was it really because you felt strongly

on the subject or because you were angry with her for insulting a friend in your house?"

"Both," said Vivian. "I started by naturally resenting her attitude to Phil. I was livid, disgusted, at what she did. Then when we started arguing I found we were poles apart. It was she who finished with me; not I with her."

"What exactly are Phil and whatever her name is? I know they're great friends. I gather they're up to no good! Are they fast, or what? I mean are they a couple of tarts that hunt in couples sharing the spoils, or what sort of thing?"

"Oh, no. Nothing like that." Vivian was surprised. She thought Clare had realised. "No—you see, they love each other very much."

"Oh, that. . . ." Clare was silent for a few minutes. "How stupid of me not to have seen what you meant. Well, Vivian, I'm not surprised Miss Macdonald was shocked, you know."

"Are you?" Vivian asked.

"I don't know them. How can I tell?"

"I mean by that sort of thing."

Vivian felt she must know, even if it meant plunging into all sorts of difficulties, into unknown abysses. It was imperative she should know.

"No. I'm not shocked. Morality, or rather immorality doesn't shock me. I think certain things are a pity, that's all. And some things don't interest me. That's one of them. Drunkenness and blasphemy shock me. Dirt, foul language and foul stories, they shock me. Immorality, like unfaithfulness in marriage, doesn't shock me, it dries me up. When I used to be living with Guy and I saw him drunk, it disgusted me, shocked me because it's ugly; but I had married him, and made a vow which said, '. . . in sickness and in health,' and I stuck to him because in a way

I felt being drunk was being ill. When he started having affairs with other women, that was different. He'd broken his vow, not I mine. It was impossible for me to share him. Not because I loved him, or was in love with him, it was just something in me. . . . I wasn't shocked. Something just broke, left me. I'm not saying I was right. Perhaps if I had met someone, fallen in love with him, I'd have been unfaithful to Guy? Who am I to say if that sort of thing is right or wrong. I've only loved one person—Guy. To me love can't be wrong, but then people commit lots of wrongs and call it love when it's anything but that. I've never come up against loving one's own kind, like the unfortunate Phil. I don't know anything about it. I can't help feeling it's all rather meaningless and pointless."

"You don't think it's hideous and revolting, and vicious, and all the things Miss Macdonald does, though?"

"No. But if two people, two girls, care for each other, they can be wonderful friends without bringing all the other business in. Look at us, for instance. I certainly can't imagine ever feeling like that about another woman. Could you?"

With a tremendous effort Vivian pulled herself together and laughed. She knew she could never, never tell Clare the truth. No matter how great the temptation, or how easy, no matter how overwhelming the longing. She looked up and saw Guy stepping over the rocks to them.

"Hullo, you two. Looking very solemn. What are you talking about?"

"Shoes and ships," began Vivian.

"We were talking of being shocked," said Clare.

"Oh, poor Vivian," laughed Guy, "your task is easy, if that was your game. Virginia is the original Puritan Maid."

"You know that isn't true," Clare said.

"No? Well, I daresay there are various opinions

about what shocks. As there are on other subjects. Did you talk about me?" he asked.

"No, I don't think we did," said Vivian.

"I'm always doing things that shock my wife. Aren't I, my Virginia?" He bent down and kissed her. . . .

Clare smiled and made no movement. Vivian looked away. What if Clare had lied to her? Not consciously, she would never do that. But if she loved him still? He was her husband still, she knew he still wanted her. Vivian knew enough these days to read Guy's eyes, to understand the things his eyes said.

"Look, Vivian's shy, because I'm making love to my wife," he spoke jestingly. Vivian felt she could strike him.

"Do you admire my Virginia, Vivian?" he asked her, in a bantering manner.

"Of course I do," Vivian took care to speak lightly. "She's beautiful. Aren't you, Virginia?" she laughed.

"Don't you call me Virginia," Clare said.

"You're very pretty yourself, Vivian," said Guy, and he looked at her, wondering how it was she did not really interest him. Her hair was pretty. Short like a boy's, it reminded him of Phil, except that Phil's was curlier. Her enormous grey eyes were really beautiful, like a stricken deer's—and her tall slim figure was as good as he'd ever seen. She was too pale, though, and too solemn. He didn't want her—even taking her against her will would be no fun. Some girls threw themselves at you, that was all very well if you wanted them—sometimes sex was enough. Just sex and nothing more. Most women fell easily for him. But there were some who had to be fought for. What a lot of sadistic pleasure when you had them finally in your power, licking the dust, begging for more. Beaten, docile, silly little animals. But this Vivian—he knew she'd be no sport at all. And her stricken eyes would just look

at him—senseless—or they might smoulder in dull anger, but she would make no fight, she would always be her own self, belonging to no one.

Then he caught sight of her, caught her unawares as she looked at Virginia Clare—hungrily, brokenly, miserably. And he guessed her secret, and chuckled to himself. So that was how the land lay ! Well, he'd soon put a stop to that. He got up and stretched.

" You remind me somewhat of Phil, you know," he turned to Vivian.

" How funny, we were talking about her."

" I wonder what I should think of her," said Clare idly.

" Oh, not your type at all. She and her Saarkoff woman would bore you to death." He turned to Vivian : " Very normal person, our Virginia, aren't you ? She pretends that sort of thing interests her——"

" I don't," interrupted Virginia.

" And it bores her like hell. And so do the people who go in for it, don't they ? "

" Yes, yes, yes," said Virginia, who did not want to start discussing anything with him.

" Well, I'm going to paddle with Michael," Vivian got up abruptly as she spoke.

Guy smiled and took out his pipe and lit it. When Vivian reached the sea where Michael was paddling, she turned. She could only see that Clare and her husband were apparently talking quite happily and that he had his arm round her shoulders.

. . . . . .

Several days later Guy asked Vivian to go out in the boat with him.

" Virginia's got some writing to do," he said, " and we want some fish."

They set off early in the afternoon. It was a fair-sized

open motor-boat. Guy had hired it when he arrived. They put out the line for mackerel and went round the bay for about two hours, catching a few, speaking little. Presently they steered out towards Mevagissey, and knocking the engine off dead slow, tried for pollock.

"You know . . ." Guy began, "I hate to see someone deliberately making a fool of themselves."

"How d'you mean?" said Vivian.

"You. You've no idea how ridiculous you're making yourself—and to no purpose, my dear."

At that moment he felt a tug on his line, and started pulling the line in.

"What on earth are you talking about?" said Vivian, trying to keep her voice calm.

"You know quite well what I'm driving at. Yourself and Virginia."

"Virginia has no idea at all," she began, and realised she had completely given herself away.

"Good Lord, my dear girl, I know that! I'm talking to you for your own good. I know Virginia pretty well—though I daresay in your present mood you won't take to that—and all that sort of thing not only bores her, but nauseates her."

"I tell you Virginia doesn't know," said Vivian, coldly sullen.

"She will if you don't mind out. It's pretty obvious! But she's a kind creature, can't bear hurting a friend, especially someone she's grateful to. So . . ." and he stopped.

"Go on," said Vivian.

"Well, I don't want to hurt you. You probably think me quite a brute as it is."

"Please go on," said Vivian impatiently.

"Well, Vivian, if you really want to know, you're erring on the tactless."

"Tactless? . . . I don't . . ."

"Virginia's my wife. I haven't seen her for a long time. I grant you it was my own fault she left me, but that's all over now. Anyway I'm still her husband. I really came down here to see the boy, poor little devil, but now—her." He glanced at the girl, who looked very white.

"I say, the sea isn't getting too rough for you, is it?" he enquired quite tenderly.

"Good God, no," she exclaimed.

"When I arrived in Polkerris, Virginia told me you were staying with her. She gave me to understand for a few more days only. Of course I said that was all right, but those 'few days' . . . Well, what about it, Vivian?"

"I'm quite sure that if Clare wanted me to leave Polkerris she would tell me to my face."

There was a pause. Guy drew in his line.

"Bait's gone," he muttered, "must have been taken while I was talking and I didn't notice him biting. You think that, do you?" he turned to Vivian, "I quite realise you love my wife," he started, "and being the kind of man I am, I'm not going to kick you out of the house, which isn't mine anyway, nor use violence, which a lot of men might. I want you to see how useless it all is. Virginia's a perfectly healthy normal woman, and only one soul's ever meant anything to her, and that's myself. As her husband I see no harm, no conceit in admitting the fact. And now she's quite ready to live with me as my wife once more. Damn good thing, too, no woman should live a celibate life when she has a perfectly good man by her."

"Do you mean that?" said Vivian.

Her voice was toneless, but there was a look of agony in her eyes. Guy felt rather ashamed.

"I do," he said firmly. "I daresay she hasn't liked to ask you to go. After all, it's natural in a way. She doesn't

know you very well, does she?" Vivian did not deny this. "And another thing," he went on relentlessly, "Michael's a heavy blow for her. She adores him, it's true, but she'd give her eyes for a healthy normal kid. Is it fair to deny her? I'll admit myself I'd like another son. It's rather hard lines on a man that his only son should be deaf and dumb—poor little Michael can't help it, of course, and he's a grand little chap in a way, but still. . . . Of course she's a mother before she's anything else—Virginia. Haven't you noticed it?" he asked her. She knew he was waiting for an answer.

"Yes. . . ." Her voice sounded a long time coming. "She worships Michael."

"Oh, yes, she does, and would other kids, too. Besides, as I say, and she says, too, she should be living her life as wives do. I don't want to seem tactless, Vivian, needlessly so, but I should have thought you'd have realised that she wants me up there with her. I daresay people, not that there are many, must think it odd that I, her husband, live in the village pub, and . . ."

"Oh, stop, you've said enough. I'm sorry, Guy. You see I'd no idea of any of this. When we knew you were coming. . . ." She stopped. After all she couldn't give Clare away.

"Quite, quite," said Guy pleasantly, "I daresay she felt differently from what she does now. Women do change their minds. And you do understand, don't you?"

"Yes, yes," she said, wearily.

"I tell you what. We'll do a change. I'll come over to the cottage, and you . . ."

"No, thank you, Guy. It's quite all right. I shall leave for Devonshire to-morrow. There are lots of reasons for returning. Just one thing, don't please tell Cl— Virginia about this. I should hate her to feel awkward in the very least."

" Of course not. You've behaved very sportingly over the whole thing, Vivian. But you'll get over it, and after all she's not a woman who would ever let you . . ."

A look at Vivian's face made him stop. Queer creatures they were, these freaks of nature. But, my Lord, he'd never thought he'd win so well, so easily.

" Let's pull in the lines and be getting back," he said.

Mechanically Vivian pulled in hers, it seemed heavy. There was a dead fish on the end of it. A big pollock.

" Been dead ages by the look of it," remarked Guy as he unhooked the gaff and threw it into the pail. " A big one, too, fancy your not feeling it pull."

Vivian stood up, her hands were like ice, her mackintosh wet through. She shivered. In the distance the Polperro fishing fleet stood out like tiny specks upon the sea, coming on towards them. The giant beacon, the Gribben, stood high and alone, towering above the Canice Rock. Alone like her, ready to meet the best and the worst. Her heart felt like a piece of lead, and she wondered if there could ever be any 'best' for her again. The sun was setting across the bay, the sky seemed on fire. On fire, like her heart.

. . . . .

Guy went indoors to look for his wife. She was upstairs, just finishing putting Michael to bed.

" Hullo, my beautiful," he bent down and kissed the top of her head, and chucked young Michael under the chin.

" Caught anything ? " she asked.

" A few."

" Where's Vivian ? "

" Gone to have a look at the car, I believe."

" The car ? She's not using it. I'm sure she must be cold and getting hungry. Go and call down the street for her."

" Virginia, we've got to be tactful with Vivian. I think she's getting fed up and Devon-sick."

Clare looked up surprised.

"I'm sure you're wrong," she said.

"Well, I've been having a talk to her, and she said it was high time for her to be getting back. And I think she realises she's rather in the way, too."

"She needn't feel that, good heavens!"

"Well, isn't it rather ridiculous, there am I pigging it down in the village, and I should be here by rights?"

"By rights?" questioned Virginia Clare. "What rights; whose rights?"

"I know this isn't my house," Guy began, "but I still have a husband's rights. But I don't want to press them on you, Virginia. But what about a lover's rights?"

"You mean . . ."

"Only that I'm as much in love with you as I ever was. That I want you, want you terribly. Virginia, darling, beautiful. . . . Look at me, can't you see I'm speaking the truth? It's torture to be in that bloody little inn down the road, and know you're up here only waiting really. And just that moon-eyed lunatic keeping me away."

"Who d'you mean?" she asked.

"Vivian. She looks like the village natural at times."

Guy took her into his arms and started kissing her, her eyes, behind her neck, up her arm. He knew it would not be safe to say any more about Vivian. Once out of the house all well and good. But the only chance of getting her out was to pretend she was bored, bored with Polkerris, with Virginia.

"Clare darling," Vivian said during supper. "I've been thinking. I really ought to be getting home. I've had the most wonderful time, but there are lots of things I ought to see to, and there . . ."

"Are you bored?" Clare asked.

"Bored? Good Lord, of course not."

But Vivian was nervous. She stammered, her voice rang false. Virginia Clare looked at Vivian and at Guy. Vivian stared unhappily at her plate. Guy was deliberately avoiding her gaze.

"Of course, my dear. If you feel you must go, you must. But I shall miss you terribly."

She spoke so sincerely that Vivian was nonplussed. But she couldn't stay in Polkerris at the inn, knowing that Guy was with Clare—it would be a sheer impossibility.

A little later on Clare left the room. Guy was reading the paper.

"Guy," she said quietly, "on your honour, were you speaking the truth when you told me Clare wanted you with her?"

"What? Oh, yes," and he turned to the paper once more.

Guy took care that the two women were not together for long again. It was near midnight before he left the cottage that night. Virginia he could see was very tired, and Vivian he knew would not start an argument.

Next morning he was across early, and did not leave them. He saw to it that his greatest charms should be apparent to Vivian; to all intents and purposes he was a devoted husband. And Clare seemingly responded. Only Vivian fought her battle alone, her heart growing heavier and sadder.

"Well," she got up from the coffee and looked at her watch. "I suppose I ought to see about starting." They all rose. "I must go and kiss young Michael." She wandered out into the garden. Michael was having his afternoon rest. When he saw Vivian he grinned and put his arms round her neck, kissing her mouth as she bent over him.

"Good-bye, my lamb," she could hardly speak. She felt as she had the first time she had gone to school; every-

thing had been all right till she said good-bye to her spaniel. Then the tears had come with a rush. She felt like it now with young Michael. Babies and animals, what was it about them that brought out this agony at parting? She heard a step and knew it for Clare's.

"You'll let me know how things go, won't you, darling?" Vivian spoke as steadily as she could.

"Why are you going, Vivian?"

"Because I must——"

She drew her arm from Clare's and walked quickly towards the house.

"Vivian—Vivian," Clare called. "I say, I haven't said anything in any way to offend you, to annoy you, or anything, have I?"

"My blessed angel, of course not, how could you?" They had reached the door-step, Guy was on the threshold. He saw the look in Vivian's eyes, and taking her arm, walked with her to the car.

"Mind you let us hear of you from time to time," he said kindly.

Vivian started the engine and put the car in gear.

"Well, aren't you going to say good-bye to me?" said Clare, half-amused, and half-indignant.

Vivian turned and through a maze of tears realised all she was leaving. Virginia Clare was standing by her, smiling yet bewildered, in her old green smock and cowboy hat.

Vivian drew her face down.

"Good-bye. Thank you . . ." and she felt Clare's kiss upon her lips.

Quickly she let out the clutch, and with a great roar the Renault shot up the hill. Vivian at her wheel seeing nothing, heeding nothing, aware only of a great gap, a great hurt, a sorrow she could share with nobody. And her tears fell fast.

X

VIVIAN took off her skis, blew through her fingers, and laughed.

"A morning for the Gods, what?"

She laughed and handed a piece of chocolate to the man beside her. Richard Hemmingway looked down at his companion. She seemed 'little' to him, he wanted to take care of her. Yet Vivian was tall compared to many women. Richard Hemmingway was six feet four, big, strong, a Canadian. He was forty-one, but he seemed like a schoolboy to Vivian. Both of them were staying alone at the Palace; neither had noticed the other till Vivian had crashed into him on the rink. He had been cutting figures. She was just skating round, someone had bumped heavily into her and sent her flying. They had laughed and picked each other up; then the band started a waltz. They had done it together. He asked her if she could ski, and when she told him it was her first visit to Switzerland he asked her if he might teach her. That evening had been a gala night at the hotel. They were thrown together. Both danced well, and they arranged to meet in the morning for the first lesson.

That was a fortnight ago, and every day he took her up to the mountains, every day she seemed better, steadier. She liked him so much, his fun, his sense of humour, his strength. She felt he was someone to depend on, to trust—a friend. She was completely unlike any girls he knew. He had not been back to Canada since the War, except for

one month to his grandfather's ranch in Alberta, and there were no women there. The girls he knew were English, Americans, or French for the most part. All amusing in their way, but one tired of them so soon. They never left one alone. Minxes for the most part; and the drink they put away! He had a villa on the Riviera. He met a good many people there, and for the most part they sickened him after a short time. Wasters, good-for-nothings, and he asked himself time after time why he went back. Old memories, old love, the remains of what should have been life; all in one small lonely grave, beneath a tiny cross in the little cemetery of Cap Ferrat. All that remained of Daphne. She had been so young, so pretty when they were married. How little he had really known of her; it was only three months later she died of pneumonia.

She had adored the South, the blue sea, the mimosa, the Esterelles. One day they had found the little Cap Ferrat cemetery together, and laughingly she asked him to bury her there if she died anywhere in France. Three weeks later she had her wish.

Six years ago now, but the place drew him back, time after time. He felt a traitor whenever he seriously thought about selling the villa. He couldn't forsake her, poor little lonely Daphne, sleeping under her small mound, a mimosa bush guarding her feet, a young cypress her head.

Something about Vivian reminded Richard Hemmingway of his wife. The youth of her, for Vivian looked very young, the solemn seriousness in her eyes. Eyes that suddenly blazed in rapture and abandon at the gigantic beauty of Swiss mountains, at the reflection of the sunset across the lake; and her warm enthusiasm for the places he took her to, tiny villages looking as though they had stepped out of the pages of Grimm's fairy stories; and the forest land at night, when the full moon lit the snow-

covered fir trees till they seemed bewitched, and Vivian would stand and catch her breath and gasp with sheer joy at so much beauty. He watched her now as she pulled off her cap and dropped into a seat.

"What does it make you feel like?" she asked him.

"Pretty good," said Hemmingway, "and generally ruined by the thought that I can't stay for ever."

"When will you have to go then?" she asked.

"Some day next week. I must do a bit of work before I go home."

"Aren't work and home the same place?" she asked him.

"My work's in Paris. My home, if you can call it so, is in the South of France. I have a small villa at Cap Ferrat."

"Oh, how nice! It's so lovely out there. I stayed one winter in Beaulieu, and I used to walk over to Cap Ferrat and St. Jean. D'you live there alone? I mean have you got a family or anything? I always imagine you living like me, quite alone."

"I live there because of my wife being buried out there. We came down there together, hadn't been married very long, she caught pneumonia and died. She said once she would like to be buried out there if she ever died. Somehow although it's a long time ago I can't bring myself to leave the place. Morbid, I guess you'd think." He wondered why he bothered to explain it all to her.

"No, I think I understand. It's so peaceful there," she said presently.

"Yes, but the other places aren't. A modern Sodom and Gomorrah the whole of the Riviera now. Don't you think? The people are frightful, one becomes so oneself. All one does is drink, gamble, play tennis. God! that tennis! And all the time I feel a fraud, to myself, to the crowds I mix with, to Daphne."

"Daphne? Your wife?"

"Yes. Then I go and work in Paris, which I loathe—I detest all cities. The only time I feel a man is when I get out here, as I do every year just for a week or two."

"You're like me, I believe," Vivian said, "the mountains get you. They always do. I used to go to Skye once upon a time, that began it. I felt I belonged to them. The big wild things of nature, the wild parts of Cornwall, d'you know them?" And her face suddenly saddened. She had forgotten. She tried hard not to think of Clare, it was so obvious that she didn't need her. For months no word, and still the craving hunger was in her heart. The same terrific force inside her that made her cry for the mountains and the rocks and the sea. For these things were big and real, and her love for Clare was the same, and she felt about one as she did about the other.

"I've never been to Cornwall, no," he was saying, "not to the West of England at all."

"I live in Devonshire—have done all my life. But somehow lately I've felt unsettled, uprooted as it were. I think I shall probably leave and go somewhere else."

"Why d'you live alone?" he asked her abruptly one evening. They had been dancing, but it was late now. The band had finished, most of the people had gone to bed. A few elderly English couples were still playing bridge in the lounge. He led the way to the bar, ordering a whisky and soda for himself, an orangeade for Vivian. He found the place deserted, Peter the barman was packing up for the night. They sat down by a table; she took the cigarette he offered her.

"I live by myself because I've nobody to live with," said Vivian in answer to his question. "I've done so for ages. My father and mother are both dead, you know. I've no relations—I don't mind it."

"Why don't you marry someone?"

"Why?" She sounded surprised. "I have quite a good time. I hunt and I travel about whenever I want to. And—and—anyway—I don't want to marry. I'm not the marrying sort."

"That's rot! You say that because you've probably never been in love. All women should marry."

She looked at him with a faint glimpse of amusement in her eyes.

"D'you really think so?" she asked. Something in her voice startled him.

"No, I suppose I'm wrong. Obviously there are cases when marriage doesn't fit. Women with certain careers, women who literally won't give a darn for homes and kids, but I think they're exceptions, don't you? I can't see you in those categories."

"Can't you?" She was silent for a few minutes. "Doesn't it strike you that it's a silly question to put to someone,—'Why aren't you married?'—surely there are several reasons why lots of people aren't."

"I'm sorry," he felt he'd been clumsy, that he'd been tactless, hurt her feelings. He hadn't meant to. If she had been a plain or unattractive woman obviously he would never have asked such a personal question. He had meant it flatteringly more than anything else.

"Oh, I don't mind; please don't think I do. But people are always asking one that question."

Hemmingway cursed himself for ever having brought up the subject.

"All I can say is," he said, "that some man's a fool somewhere."

Vivian laughed.

"I suppose that's meant as a compliment," she said, "but you're wrong. I'm not made for anyone's wife."

"Wait till you fall in love."

"Oh!" She stifled a sigh, got up from the table and went to the french window.

"I'm sorry," he said quietly. What a fool he was! The girl had obviously had some tragic love affair; that perhaps was the reason for her sad eyes.

"Glorious night, what about a short turn before you go to bed?" he asked.

"Let's! It's looking so lovely out."

She opened the door and drew her wrap round her. Their footsteps crunched along the pathway where the snow had already started to freeze. Only a few lights burned in the hotel window; the trees everywhere were hung with white mantles. They walked to the end of the terrace; the moon came out from behind a cloud. Hundreds of feet below them lay the lake: vast, serene, asleep, and only a few lights on the shore, twinkling like fireflies, made them realise there was life down there, that there were towns and people.

"Isn't it heavenly?" she breathed.

"Places do affect you, don't they? You are like Daphne sometimes. She used to go quite mad about scenery. She wouldn't have cared for this, though. Too cold, too hard. She had a passion for the sun. She would never have come to Canada with me. She hated Paris, said she always felt cold. She adored Italy."

"Does it get any better?" Vivian found herself saying. "The awful loneliness without her?"

He stopped to think. He wanted to answer her question properly. Of course he missed Daphne, missed the enchantment of her, the romance of her. But it would be an exaggeration to pretend he was a broken man, inconsolable, even unhappy. Yes, he supposed he'd 'got over it' for what that was worth. He was faithful to her memory

because nobody had caused him to be otherwise. And the sudden realisation of this came as a shock to him. He looked at Vivian, what had she on her mind, he wondered? It was a pretty miserable face he concluded. And till to-day, quiet though she had always been, there had been fun and enthusiasm in her; she had laughed, been gay. He felt tender to her, he wanted to protect her.

"My dear, one gets over everything sooner or later. The old cliché about time is quite right."

"I wonder. Sometimes I hope so because if not life would be unbearable, wouldn't it? Then again I think if one forgot one would be rather despicable."

"That depends so much on what it is we're forgetting, or trying to."

"You're awfully kind, awfully understanding," she said.

"Vivian, tell me what's the matter. . . ."

Should she? She was lonely, terribly lonely; she felt a tremendous urge to speak to someone.

"What are people generally sad about?" she said rather bitterly.

"There's someone you care terribly about?" he asked. And his voice was kind.

She nodded.

"Can't you possibly marry him, can't anything come of it?"

"No. I'm afraid it can't," she said in a rather flat voice, and thought how funny the question was really, if only it didn't hurt so much.

"I haven't been thinking about it, not for the last few weeks. To-day you said something that started it all over again."

"I'm so sorry——"

"You couldn't help it. No one can help cuts starting to bleed all over again."

"Is he married?" Hemmingway asked.

She nodded.

"Does he love you?"

"No. Not like that. Not even as a friend nowadays, I'm afraid. I haven't even heard from——" she stammered, "from the person for three months. So you see I'm very silly; it's always been useless, and I'm a fool to be hurt so easily."

"How did it happen?"

"Oh, I don't know. How do these things happen? I was like a very silly chicken dashing out into a road when a motor was passing. It wasn't going particularly quickly, but it ran into me and knocked me flat. My fault. Sometimes one loves—it just happens. . . ."

"And what are you going to do about it?"

"I haven't thought. I'm quite well off——" she laughed nervously. "I can do what I like. Maybe I'll go on one of those tours round the world."

"You know, I don't like to think of you living all alone. You want taking care of."

Vivian looked at him and laughed.

"You've got me all wrong, you know; I believe you think I'm a poor weak female, falling into swoons when left alone. I'm not, I assure you. I'm more like a man than a woman."

At this he chuckled. How absurd she was. There was nothing masculine that he could see in the slim, rather delicate looking girl beside him. Her youth and her short hair gave her perhaps a boyish appearance, but to say she was like a man. . . .

"In the life I lead," she explained, seeing the way he looked at her, "you're not brought up in the country, breeding dogs and hunting for nothing! And I can take a car to pieces, and drive it, as well as you, I bet!"

He pretended to look impressed.

"Can you really now? Of course, that makes all the difference. . . . Vivian"—she heard his voice coming through the distance to her—"will you marry me? Of course, I know you can't care for me. But I'd try and make you forget all the wretchedness you've been through. I'd do everything in my power to make you happy. We're both of us lonely creatures on God's earth. How about it?"

Vivian was so surprised that at first she could say nothing. Marry Richard Hemmingway! Would this be a way out? Could she go through with marriage? She liked him, liked him so much. The thought of someone there, someone to lean upon, someone she could help, too, and who would depend on her for comradeship and affection? But if Clare should ever need her? It wasn't probable, nor even very possible, but she knew she would fly from one end of the earth to the other if such a summons came. Would it be fair to Richard?

"My dear," she turned to him, "I don't know how to answer you. You see I don't love you—not in the way you'd want me to. I shall only love one person with the whole of me, ever, and if ever that person wanted me I should go. I wouldn't be able to help it. Would that be any use to you as a wife? And, Richard, you'd have my friendship, that sort of love, always. But that's the only kind I can offer you."

"My dear—think it over. I don't want to hurry you, but there it is. You'd make me awfully happy—and proud." He tried to laugh.

"I will. I hope I'll say yes, Richard, you're such a dear, and I like you terribly."

He picked up her shawl which had slipped off her shoulder, and wrapped it round her, kissing her gently as he did so.

"Come back indoors," he said.

Neither of them spoke a word on the way back to the hotel. The place seemed dead, so quiet, so deserted. He saw her to the lift, where the sleepy night-porter blinked at them in astonishment.

"Bless you!" he said, and pressed her hand, and Vivian felt as though a load had been taken from her heart. A refuge—that was Richard. She felt like some battered wreck that had come upon harbour and safe anchorage just before crashing for ever on the rocks. At peace—rest at last. Rest. . . . But what if the sea should call again, drawing her once more, drawing her away? And what if the vessel should drag her moorings? Wouldn't she be wafted out to sea and the storm once again? And would there be a second chance, a second harbour?

XI

Another week went by. Richard Hemmingway put off his return to Paris, said that his work was not important, that it could wait. He realised he was falling very much in love with Vivian. His heart leapt in the early morning, knowing that at ten o'clock he would see her, they'd have a long day together; he needed no conversation, just the nearness of her; and the knowledge that she was growing used to him, that already her eyes sparkled, and she looked more radiant; that she smiled, and he saw she was happy.

"Penny for your thoughts?" she said one evening, looking at him with a smile.

"I was thinking that sometimes we bite off more than we can chew," he spoke lightly.

"Apropos of what?"

He did not answer. Her heart stopped beating,—was he tired of her, bored with her?

"Us, d'you mean?"

"In a way, yes."

"D'you want to call it off?"

She tried to speak with as little concern in her voice as she could.

"God, no!"

She looked at him, startled.

"Vivian my dearest, I'll have to warn you. It's going to be so damn difficult,—you see I've fallen so terribly in love with you."

Not a strange statement from a man to the girl he's

asked to marry him. Yet to Vivian the words came as a shock. Not particularly an unpleasant one, but something totally unexpected, unbargained for. She knew he liked her, more than liked her, or why should he have asked her to marry him. She knew he was sorry for her, and his pity coming from his own rather lonely heart had comforted and not annoyed. But that he should actually come to being in love with her. . . .

"Oh, my dear," she looked at him helplessly. What was she to do?

"I don't suppose you understand what I'm getting at. You've loved, I know; but a woman's love for a man is totally different. You couldn't have the same aching, longing, almost blinding desire for a man to want to hurt and yet to worship, to be infinitely tender yet to kill with your love. No woman could feel that, and that's the sort of thing I'm going through now."

Vivian said nothing for a minute or two. That she should have the power to rouse these feelings in someone! Feelings she knew so well. Dispassionately she took his hand and squeezed it. She wanted to be his friend and comfort him. She wasn't Vivian Osborne, she was somebody utterly apart, listening to the things he had to say.

"I know," she spoke quietly. "D'you think I don't know what it is to go hungry day and night, for a look, a word, gathering the least crumbs in such greed that a starved beggar would be a king in comparison. To lie awake at night, telling oneself that such hopelessness must be a nightmare. To have to be ordinary, amusing, talk about everyday affairs when all you can think of is the poetry in your mind and the music in your heart, when you want nothing but to take them in your arms and give them the treasures of the world; and when every kiss

you get back is worth more than every king's ransom since the world began."

"And *you* have loved like that?"

It staggered him, almost shocked him.

"And you'll marry me knowing you're capable of feelings like those for somebody else?"

"Perhaps you don't want me any more. I'm a fraud."

"I want you, God knows! In a way it makes things simpler. You can understand."

Vivian turned to him.

"I'll marry you, Richard. But,—and it's a Hell of a 'but'—if ever Clare does send for me I must go to her." And as Vivian spoke she knew she'd given herself away.

"Her?"

"Clare's a woman, Richard. Now perhaps you know why I haven't told you before. It's out now, and in a way I'm glad. I suppose you'll hate me now, look upon me as so much offal. That's the way the world does look on that kind of love."

He felt staggered, in a different world. Never, never would he have guessed that Vivian—it explained a good deal. He was astonished to find it did not shock him very greatly. He was dazed, that was all. It was like taking a wrong railway ticket and coming out of the tunnel finding oneself in Russia when you'd taken your ticket to Rome. He felt an enormous pity for Vivian welling in his heart. It had not lessened his love for her; he knew it was a gigantic cross she was bearing, that people would hurl stones and pelt her whenever they had the chance. He would stay by her.

"My poor little Vivian," and he put his arm round her.

"You don't mind, then?" she asked.

"Tell me how it happened," he asked her. Slowly she told him, all there was to tell. Her friendship with Phil,

and her realisation of Phil and Andrée. Robin—Flora Macdonald—and her meeting with Clare, and her love for her.

"Poor darling," he said when she had finished.

"Then you don't hate me, despise me?" she asked him.

"My dear, who am I to judge if you're right or wrong? You couldn't help yourself. I'm terribly sorry for you."

"To me it's not wrong," Vivian said lifelessly; "how can there be wrong in the love I have for Clare, which is all the best of me, the most unselfish, the most beautiful? She's everything that makes life beautiful,—to me. These mountains, the sunsets, the lovely thrilling glory of an evening sea in winter, they're Clare to me, not just water and rock and red sky. Are you going to tell me that's all wrong? All beastly?"

"You're revolutionising civilisation if you start on that tack. And, Vivian, you may feel like that about Clare, but there are hundreds of people whose feelings have no beauty in them, and would commit heaven knows what under your excuses."

"Thank you for being so wonderfully understanding," Vivian said after a pause.

"You see, dear, I think you're a bit of a visionary. And you make it all out worse than it is. You don't need to martyr yourself when a pretty strenuous jerk and pull-up is all you need."

"You mean . . ."

"I think you're attaching a lot of physical importance to what is only very mental."

"I'm afraid you're wrong, Richard. If you love someone completely and utterly you can't keep physical feelings out of it. To me it's all beautiful, I refuse to desecrate it by calling it rotten, unnatural, vicious."

"I'm going to get you a stiff drink," said Richard, "and one for myself, and then I'm going to send you off to bed; you're tired."

He came back a few minutes later with two brandies and sodas. Vivian drank hers slowly. He watched her; neither spoke.

"Richard dear," she said as they went upstairs, "will you—even though you've finished with me—always be my friend?"

"I still want you to be my wife," he took her arm gently, "I want to try to help you to forget," he said.

The next day or two neither Richard nor Vivian mentioned what had passed. They were out all day skiing and skating. Then it rained for two days; they went down to the lake, lunched at Montreux, wandered over Chillon, discovered places of amusement in Lausanne and Vevey. All the time he was gentle to her and thoughtful, trying to amuse her, interest her, take her mind off the past. . . .

It was Saturday morning, when Vivian found a letter on her breakfast tray, re-addressed from Dulbridge. It had borne a London post mark originally and a 'Please forward' in the corner. She tore it open and her heart seemed to stand still.

'DEAREST VIVIAN,' it ran:

'I've tried so hard to get hold of you—written to you, wired you, and nothing happened. Then I telephoned, and the caretaker or whoever you left at Dulbridge tells me you've gone abroad and aren't having letters sent on. She said if I put "Please forward" she would do so.

'I've treated you rather horribly, I know, never writing or anything. Will you forgive me? You're so kind to me always, please do.

'I'm going to ask you something. Will you help me? Guy has gone to America, and I do want to see you. I'm going to have a baby, and I'm feeling rather desperate. Not about having it, but about life altogether. I'm not very amusing, and shall soon look frightful I suppose,—but I can't bear being alone, which sounds awfully silly, but I can't help it.

'If you're busy or don't want to come, tell me, please. I shall perhaps go to a nursing home or find something somewhere. I'm in the middle of a book, too—altogether you would find me a dull and even irritable companion, my dear, but an eternally grateful one.

'My love to you,

'CLARE.'

Vivian shut her eyes. Was it true, was it just a dream? Clare, the beloved Clare, asked her to go to her. Life did hold out its hands with twofold blessings then after all. She looked at the letter again, 'I do want to see you'—that in itself was summons enough. Had Guy left her? Left her for ever? In her heart she prayed it might be so. She knew the worthlessness of him, perhaps Clare realised it herself now. Then she could stay and take care of her always. What had Phil once said to her? Something about making Andrée happier than most men could. She could make herself so indispensable to Clare that she would never let her go. Her heart ached for her when she thought about her baby. She dreaded the thought of all that pain for her, but maybe she wanted it, wanted another child.

She dressed hurriedly and found Richard. She had forgotten all about him in her excitement, and in her joy did not remember her promises. Everything was blotted out, save the one thing—Clare needed her.

"Richard, Richard!" she ran to him. "It's happened. I've heard. Clare needs me, wants me. Oh, my dear."

Richard was stunned. Then quickly pulled himself together.

"When do you want to go?"

It was characteristic of him, thought Vivian, that he did not say 'do you want?' She pressed his hand.

"Bless you," she whispered.

Richard settled everything, got her ticket, booked her sleeper, told them at the bureau that she was leaving.

"I've arranged it," he said at lunch, "two sleepers on the Simplon to-night. I shall come with you as far as Paris, there's no point in staying without you. I couldn't. If you'd like me to come all the way to England I will."

"You are a marvellous pal," said Vivian. "No. I'll be all right alone. I'd rather really."

She sent off a wire to Clare: 'Arriving England to-morrow. Vivian.'

The train did not leave Montreux till nearly midnight. Neither of them had the heart to do much, however, and they decided to start early and dine in Montreux.

For the first time there seemed to be silences, embarrassments between them. Vivian was distrait, her mind many miles away; Richard was trying not to show the misery he was feeling.

"My dear," he said as he drank his coffee, "I shan't get much more chance of saying things to you, you'll go to bed as soon as the train comes in, and we arrive in Paris so early in the morning. But I want you to promise that you'll write to me, that you'll let me know whenever, or if ever, you need me at all. Just send me a wire, I shall always be the same; I mean it."

Her eyes filled with tears; in her happiness she hated hurting him.

"I don't deserve all your devotion, Richard. But you have my love, for what that's worth, and unending gratitude."

The journey seemed endless to Vivian. Her parting with Richard unnatural and abrupt. She was relieved when the train left Paris. The crossing was rough, but she was a good sailor. Her heart beat with expectation as she sat in the carriage; Victoria station had never loomed so golden. Her luggage was easy to trace, she had nothing to declare.

As she sat back in her taxi, and told the driver to go to Brown's, where she had booked a room for the night, she told herself that her past unhappiness was worth this new joy. What matter if her castles in the air never came to earth? A cottage would do! Just being with Clare would be heaven enough. She noticed some shops were still open, and stopped at a florist. There were some dark red roses in the window.

"I want those sent to this address, please," and on a card she wrote: 'Clare darling, will be with you to-morrow and will ring you up to-night. Vivian.'

She got back into the taxi. She felt herself alive once more. They were held up in a traffic block, and an unemployed man jumped on the step of the taxi and threw a little black cat into her lap.

"For luck, lidy, for luck——"

"Here you are," and she chucked him a ten shilling note, "it's all I've got." She laughed at his face of thrilled astonishment, "I've just got my luck. Tons of it, I've been dead and have come alive again!"

The traffic started to move again, the man sprang off the footboard.

"Blimey—mad, she must be," and he stared after the retreating car, and shrugged his shoulders.

XII

It seemed to Vivian through the next few weeks that she must hitherto have been living in a dream, some horrible nightmare. As each day went by she realised more and more how tremendous a thing her love for Virginia Clare was. It did not seem to matter that it was really a very one-sided affair, that Clare took with both hands all the service she had to offer—took it with gratitude, it was true, but rather as a matter of course. The empty months without her made Vivian happy just to be there beside her—she tried hard not to wish for the moon, to banish thoughts that would still come. After the first meeting when Clare had seemed disquieted, strange, even awkward with her, they settled down happily. Now that Clare knew she was alone no longer, that Vivian obviously wanted nothing better than to stay there, helping her, she settled down in the little Hampstead house she had taken until the baby was born—resigned, expectant.

Vivian was surprised that she spoke of the baby very little. She seemed aloof from it, uninterested, giving all her time and thought to the book she was writing. She would shut herself up for hours, sometimes refusing to come downstairs for meals. She seemed irritable if remonstrated with, and only when Vivian as a last resort told her that Michael seemed restless at her everlasting disappearances would she leave the studio where she worked and come down. She still clung to Michael, and became nervous, restless if he went out with anyone but Vivian

or herself. But as the days wore on and she put off taking him on the Heath even for a short hour it fell to Vivian to act as nurse, companion, almost mother to the child. It tied her, she very seldom got away from the place, but she never questioned the running of her life now. Looking after Michael gave Clare peace of mind, and that to Vivian was all that mattered. If Clare worried it meant she could not work, and if she did not work she grew restless and did not sleep, and Vivian would worry because of Clare's approaching motherhood.

The book was finished by the end of March, and they decided to go down to Dulbridge, for the baby was not going to be born until July. Vivian suggested Polkerris as she thought the sea air would be better for Clare, and the sands more amusing for Michael.

" No, no—don't ask me to go there again, I couldn't." Clare's voice was harsh ; unnatural it sounded to Vivian's ears. But she said no more about it and asked for no explanation.

They spent six weeks at Dulbridge. How glad Vivian was that she still had the place. She bought a pony for Michael and taught him to ride, first in the orchard and then later when he grew more at his ease they would picnic all day in different parts of the moor, and Michael's face would light up and a great smile spread over his whole face as the two of them would ride off, Vivian on her mare and he on a leading rein by her side. Clare would be left in some quiet spot with a book—she read a lot these days—and they would take care to keep in her sight.

One warm May evening, as they sat in the garden after dinner, Vivian looked up and saw Clare sitting still, an odd expression in her eyes. She noticed her book was upside down.

" Why don't you ever do any work, Clare ? Sewing,

I mean. I thought all expectant mothers 'busied their fingers with tiny garments.'"

"Do you really imagine I want this baby?" Her tone was a strange mixture of indignation and reproach. Vivian was dumbfounded.

"Don't you?" was all she could find to say.

"I try not to think about it. I know it's unnatural, wrong, but I resent it. Not the having it so much as the baby itself. I'm jealous of it, for Michael's sake."

"But, darling," said Vivian, "think what a difference, a lovely difference, it will make to Michael. Something to play with, his own age more or less in a few years, a live toy—he'll adore having it. I'm sure you're wrong to feel like that."

"Guy made me have it. He shall be made to look after it when it's born; I only hope to God it's not a girl."

"Made you?"

"He said he was being done out of his son. That I was keeping him from him. In a way it was true. He threatened to take him away. I knew it was only his brutality, he doesn't know one thing about Michael. Can you see him looking after a child that can neither hear nor speak?"

Clare could never bring herself to say the words 'deaf and dumb.'

"It was just after you'd left me."

Vivian felt a pang, thinking of how Guy had literally told her to go.

"He became insistent on his rights, as I believe they're called. He's always attracted me, held me with some horrible compelling power, and when I refused to have anything to do with him, he said that he would take Michael unless I gave him another son."

"What a brute." Vivian was shocked beyond belief.

"How can I want a child that's been begotten in hate? For I hated him then—really hated him."

"Your poor darling. When did you last hear from him?"

"Just before you came back from Switzerland. I told you we'd had a row. He's gone to America for six months. I suppose he'll arrive in time for the event. Not for any paternal reason or pride, but just to worry me. Swear you'll not let him come near me. He doesn't know where I am. I found the house at Hampstead the day after he left, you see—any time he wants to write he has to send it to the bank."

"Don't worry, my Clare; I'll take care of you. I won't let him get near you." Her voice was calm and soothing, though her heart was surging in anger at the thought of all Clare had been through.

"Clare——" she said, a few minutes later. "Do you know why I left Polkerris?"

"I've never been quite sure. Guy said you were bored, but he also admitted to me afterwards that he'd more or less asked you to go. I thought it rather funny that you hadn't asked me if I wanted to be alone with him. After the things I'd talked to you about. After the way we'd even planned together to get rid of him. I was rather hurt."

"He didn't tell you quite the truth, then. He swore to me that you were getting bored with me, that you had changed in your attitude towards him, that you wished to be with him at the cottage, and I was in the way. And that obviously you felt too embarrassed to tell me the truth. Also he told me you wanted more children. So you see when your letter came after all that time I wasn't terribly surprised to hear you were going to have another baby. And all these weeks it has seemed sometimes rather strange that you've never talked about it. I thought you were glad to be having one. I gathered you'd had a row with Guy, you more or less told me you'd parted when I saw you that first night. I was glad, because I had no love for him."

Clare had made no sound while Vivian spoke of her husband's behaviour. Now she drew a sharp breath.

"He told you all that. . . . Those lies, *lies*—about me—I might have guessed it."

"D'you think I'd have left you for one second if I hadn't believed him?"

"Why—why—didn't you come and ask me the truth?"

"Because—Oh, I don't know. He seemed so obviously and sincerely to be telling the truth. I didn't want to make you feel awkward either. You see, I believed him."

"Yes," said Clare slowly, "what a consummate liar he is."

"You'll never know what it meant to me when your letter came. Out in Switzerland."

Clare held out her hand to Vivian.

"You are a darling to me. I don't know why. I'm a dull companion to you—soon I shall look a fright as well. But don't leave me—please."

"Never any more," Vivian told her.

The next day Vivian had a letter from Canada. It was from Richard. His grandfather had died suddenly and he had been forced to go out there at a moment's notice. He did not expect to be there long, however, and was coming back by way of England. He hadn't written to her before as he felt she hadn't wanted him to. But he was writing now in case she should need him for anything. He hoped she would see him when he was in England, he still felt the same, and would always . . .

Vivian's eyes filled with tears as she read his letter.

"Who's your letter from?" asked Clare.

"From Richard Hemmingway, from Canada."

"That man you met in Switzerland?"

Vivian nodded. Was that all he was to her? Clare made it sound like an every-day pick-up.

"I was going to marry him," she said guiltily.

"Vivian!" Clare sat up amazed. "Why haven't you ever told me? Are you engaged to him?" She sounded indignant.

"No, I changed my mind," she said.

"Why? Were you in love with him?"

"No. He was—is—with me. He's the most wonderful man I've ever met, I don't think there are many like him. If I were to lift my finger for him now, he'd come from the ends of the earth."

Vivian marvelled at Richard's devotion to her; it somehow never struck her that it was a replica of her own for Clare.

"And why did you break it off?" Clare asked.

"Your letter came. I wanted to be with you."

"You sent away this marvellous man for me? But why? My dear, why? I'm not worth such sacrifice."

"I think you are. . . ."

"Why did you do it?"

Now, if ever, was her chance. Vivian knew it. But she let the chance go by.

"I thought it a shame to marry such a very nice man when I wasn't in love with him. It seemed not quite fair to him. And I wanted to see you very badly and—well, it's all turned out very nicely, hasn't it?" she ended brightly. "It's getting cold, let's go in."

That night Clare tossed in bed, wondering in her mind at Vivian's devotion. She guessed that Vivian had only given her the half-truth in her story of her broken romance with Hemmingway. Funny girl. . . . Could Guy have been right in the things he had said about her?

Virginia Clare's daughter was born on the seventh of July. Vivian felt glad it was a girl, she believed it would soften Clare to the idea of having the baby. She could

not resent it for Michael's sake. The event was about ten days too soon and Vivian was not there. Clare said there was a MS. of great importance at Polkerris ; it seemed odd to Vivian that months should go by without it having been needed, but Clare was insistent on having it, and, as the child was not expected for a good week or more, Vivian said she would go to Polkerris and be back in two days. In the evening of her second day she had a telegram, ' Everything started but going on satisfactorily.'

She thanked God she had found the MS. safely, and without stopping for any more thought got into the car and returned to London. She drove through the night wondering if any car had ever seemed so slow. Towns, mere names, flashed by, Exeter, Yeovil, Salisbury. . . . Oh, God, if only she could have borne the pain. Half-way between Andover and Basingstoke a tyre punctured. She cursed loudly as she stood in the road, far from everywhere it seemed, changing the wheel. A faint buzz attracted her attention, it seemed to echo, ' Come . . . come,' it was the telegraph wires. Her fingers were numb with driving gloveless through the night, and it had started to rain.

At about half-past three in the morning she reached Hampstead. The house seemed very still and mysterious —without any light. Why was there no doctor's car outside, she wondered ? She let herself into the house quietly, and a second later she saw Nurse Brown coming downstairs.

" Well—I've come. Is she all right ? " Her voice sounded far away.

" Good gracious ! We never expected you till to-morrow," replied the woman, in surprise. " Everything's gone splendidly, it's a dear little girl."

" But, Mrs. Bird—did she have much pain, is she all right ? "

"Oh, yes. She had quite a good time on the whole. She's asleep now."

"Can I have a peep at her?" asked Vivian.

"Oh, no, we can't have you there yet. It might disturb her."

"Well, you'll let her know directly she's properly conscious that I'm back, won't you?" Something in the girl's voice, an almost possessive tone, made the nurse turn,

"I'll tell her," was all she said, and she looked at Vivian strangely.

Vivian dragged herself upstairs and, without taking her clothes off, fell asleep on her bed.

It was not till the following afternoon that she was allowed to see Clare, and then not for long. She tip-toed to the side of the bed. Virginia Clare lay propped up with pillows, her flaming hair looking more like a halo than ever, her face very pale, and big shadows under her eyes.

"Darling," muttered Vivian, "I'll never forgive myself for having gone and left you."

"Don't be silly," said Clare, in a whisper, "how did we know? Why did you come back so soon?"

"Why d'you think? Don't be silly and ask rubbish. Are you sure you're all right now? Anything I can get you at all?"

Clare shook her head.

"There's the baby," and she pointed wearily to a cot at the other end of the room. "It's a girl, I don't know what will happen to her."

"I do," said Vivian brightly, "you're going to love her, and Michael is going to be so proud of a sister."

At that moment Nurse Brown came in.

"You must come out now." She spoke kindly but with unmistakable authority in her voice.

. . . . . .

The days that followed were happy ones for Vivian. Clare seemed to need her, was only happy it seemed when she was near. She used to sit by her bed and read to her, a thing she'd never been asked to do before. Clare never spoke very much, it seemed to tire her, and sometimes a far-away look would come into her eyes.

Michael used to come and climb on to the bed, his eyes full of excitement and wonder. From the first he was thrilled with the baby, but this did not alter Clare's attitude, and she would only look at him and smile lovingly at him, running her fingers through his curls. The baby might have been a piece of china, a thing apart.

"What are you going to call her?" asked Vivian one day.

"Deirdre," said Virginia Clare.

"It's a beautiful name, darling, but rather sad."

"Does that matter? Yes, it means 'Our Lady of Sorrows,' I believe; or shall I call her Naomi, I believe that means something of the sort."

"Don't, darling, don't talk like that. She's such a tiny wee thing, it's going to be so ghastly if she grows up knowing she's unwanted." Vivian begged with tears in her voice.

When Deirdre was a fortnight old Guy arrived. He looked uncomfortable when the door opened and he found himself confronted with Vivian.

"Oh, so you're here," he said quietly.

"Yes, I am. What can I do for you? I am afraid it's quite impossible for you to see Virginia, she's been ill, you know."

"Having a baby—I know. My baby. I suppose it's not a particularly unusual request for a man to want to see his wife afterwards?"

"No—not when the husband's been at home, giving his

wife love and help—and comfort." Vivian steadied her voice. "But when he's got his child through violence, and left his wife for six or seven months, and the wife gets a fever at the thought of seeing him, then it's not so usual. There are two people in authority who will not let you see her—her doctor and her nurse. They know everything, and you can't bluff me a second time, either."

"I see." There was a pause, then: "Can I see the boy?"

"Michael, you mean?"

"No—no." Guy spoke impatiently. "The baby."

"It's a girl," said Vivian, "didn't you know?"

Guy laughed. "What irony! Let's have a look at it."

Vivian went upstairs and brought down the baby, a small sleeping bundle in her arms. Guy bent over it, he did not speak. Vivian watched him—he seemed absorbed in the child.

"Is she fond of it?" he asked.

"Why d'you ask?"

"The idea of this child was that it was to be a boy. I was to take it. It's a girl. She may like the idea of having a daughter. But I still keep to my wish. I want this child."

Vivian was staggered by his remark. For the truth was, she knew, that he only wanted the child out of spite to his wife.

"Virginia refuses to live with me as my wife," he continued, "that's no reason why I should be done out of my children. She has two now, she can spare me one. If she wants them, then she must live with me."

"You can't have this baby yet, it's far too young."

"The longer she has it, the fonder she'll get of it." Guy was totally unaware that he spoke aloud. "When she's old enough I shall come for her."

At that moment Michael came into the room.

"Hullo, mute," said Guy. Michael ran up to his father and put up his hand in a salute.

"Affected little ass! But you can't come along with me, old son of a gun, because, among her other Greek ideas, your selfish mother is determined to add an Œdipus complex to her way of living. I'm sorry, because it would be quite amusing having you round with your deaf and dumb brain."

Michael looked up at his father and smiled. Vivian picked him up.

"I wonder if you know how bloody you are?" she said slowly.

He smiled at her sardonically and let himself out of the front door.

That evening Vivian spoke to Virginia Clare of Guy's visit, only omitting his brutal taunts about Michael.

"Was he furious it's a girl?" asked Clare.

"No. Tell me, Clare, d'you want to keep her? Or d'you want Guy to have her?"

"Oh, I don't suppose he will now."

"I think you're wrong. If you play your cards properly." And she proceeded to tell her of the interview. All the time she felt a wave of pity for the poor little unwanted child.

"What a man," said Clare, at the end. "I doubt if anyone would believe such a nature possible."

XIII

For nearly four months everything went on peacefully and happily.

When Clare was strong enough they went to Dulbridge. She was kind to Deirdre, saw that she was well and happy. But never once did Vivian see her kiss the baby.

She became more wrapt up in Michael than ever. They returned to London in the autumn, to another house in Hampstead. Clare was ready to start her fresh book. One day a letter came to Vivian from Phil.

'My dear,

'Andrée and I are now settled in Paris. Do come over for a week.

'Yours ever,

'Phil.'

"Yes, why not?" said Clare, when Vivian asked her if she would mind. "You haven't left my side since January. I think a week's holiday away from us all would be a good thing for you."

Vivian crossed one day in the middle of November. Phil and Andrée had a charming flat near the Avenue Henri-Martin.

It was nice to see them again, and an exhilarating feeling of freedom came over her. Yet after a few days she knew she was counting the hours to her return. She realised more than ever that Clare was her life, that without her she was more adrift than any rudderless ship.

The presence of Phil and Andrée, so clearly all in all to each other, did not help matters. She wrote to Clare every day, never more than a few lines, as she knew how long letters bored her. It was not until the fifth day that she heard from Clare.

'Miss you very much, darling, but have been breaking the back of *To Windward* which is all I can think about at the moment.

'The children are well, tho' Michael is very quiet to-night, a headache poor lamb, I expect it's the fog.

'My love, as ever,

'C.'

An unsatisfying letter on the whole, but what more did she expect? She went out to Fontainebleau for the day, and when she returned there was a wire.

'For God's sake come at once Michael ill. Clare.'

For the next few hours Vivian seemed to be living in one long rush, with no time to wonder. In the train she took Clare's letter out of her bag to read once again. Beyond the bare mention of Michael's suffering from a headache there was nothing to be found there. She could only wait, hoping and praying there was nothing really serious. A headache—every childish disease started that way. Probably measles, she thought, and Clare worshipping him as she did would, of course, start worrying unnecessarily.

It was very late when she reached Hampstead. A light was burning on the upstairs landing Vivian noticed. She opened the door with her latchkey. As the door closed she heard footsteps, and turning saw Clare coming downstairs. She was deathly pale.

"Thank you for coming," she said, and walked across to the fireplace. She sat down on the fender, making no further movement towards Vivian.

"What is it?" asked Vivian.

"No one knows—properly. He can't move. It only started the night before last. A headache. It's—it's paralysis of a kind. They don't know yet if it's infantile paralysis or some form of meningitis. Oh, God . . ."

Vivian stood, feeling as though rooted to the ground. That such a thing could happen to them. . . .

"Is he conscious?" she asked.

"On the whole. But it's spreading. To-night he didn't seem to know me properly. He's in a kind of coma now."

"Perhaps that's all to the good. Thank God he's too little to be frightened or to realise much."

"To any child but Michael it would be easier. But he can't understand. Don't you see, Vivian, how it must worry him to try and move and not be able to."

"Have you got a nurse?"

"Two. They won't let either Deirdre's nurse or me look after him. Vivian, they're keeping me from him. I think I shall go mad—but I daren't say too much, they might take him off somewhere. They might refuse to let me see him at all, they keep saying I mustn't excite him. Damn fools, don't they realise I'm the person who should be with him, who can understand properly. Dr. Abdy says it's not fair on Deirdre, that all this will upset both of us—as if that matters."

She spoke wearily, yet there was a spark of anger in her voice. Vivian guessed she was resenting the baby more than ever.

"Come upstairs and try and get some sleep, darling."

She put her arm round Clare and helped her upstairs.

"Come and wake me if you want anything at all. Won't you take something so you can get a little sleep?"

"No, no. I might fall right off and they might want me."

Vivian went to her room and began slowly to undress. She felt sick. What was Clare going to do if anything should happen to Michael? At the best if it were infantile paralysis it would leave him wrecked for life. What a tragedy Michael's little life was—to be born deaf and dumb, and now to fall a victim to this ghastly illness. He was everything to Clare; what if he should die. She said the words over to herself, dead—dead—dying. Surely God would never let such a thing happen. To Clare who deserved no unhappiness, who had been through enough misery already—what had she ever done that she should have to pay so much?

"Oh, God," she prayed, "don't let Michael die. Please God, dear God, let him get better. If there's anything awful to happen, let it happen to me. I promise I'll try never to do anything wrong again, if you'll only let Michael live."

Next morning he seemed a little better. He smiled at Vivian when she went into him for a few minutes. Clare came into the room—she looked very pale, but smiled at Michael cheerfully.

"Hullo, my darling! Feeling a little better? I've got a lovely new picture-book, look! You lie back in Mummie's arms and she'll turn the pages over for you to see."

She sat at the head of the bed and held him close to her. Vivian saw he was trying to make an effort; it was the most pathetic thing she had ever known. She got up and walked out of the room. The nurse followed her, to go into the bathroom. Vivian waited till she came out, and said:

"Nurse, is it really infantile paralysis?"

"They can't say yet. It's an extremely violent germ, too sudden really for the usual paralysis. I've only known one case like this before, and that was someone a good deal older."

"Did the person get over it?"

"I'm afraid not. He died."

"D'you think there's a chance in this one?"

"One always hopes. Both Sir William and Mr. Abdy are very anxious, I'm afraid. I'm so glad you're here, Miss Osborne. I'm afraid for Mrs. Bird."

"You needn't worry that she'll upset him," said Vivian shortly.

"No—but it's too bad, isn't it? Just while she's still nursing her baby, too. There's Sir William, I must go."

Vivian was in the hall when the two doctors came downstairs. Clare was not with them.

"Ah!—hullo, Miss Osborne." Doctor Abdy came forward. "I'm so glad you've come. This is a bad business. Sir William, this is Miss Osborne who lives with Mrs. Bird."

"He does seem a bit better to-day, doesn't he?" pleaded Vivian.

"Yes." The man spoke thoughtfully. "Not a very good sign, I'm afraid. I have to be off now to an operation. But I shall be up again early this afternoon. Are you coming with me, Abdy?"

At about six o'clock the following morning Vivian was awakened by a tap on the door.

"Come in," she said quickly. The nurse came into her room.

"Miss Osborne, the little boy won't live much longer. He's completely unconscious, it's really only a question of an hour or so, I'm afraid. But I didn't want to wake Mrs. Bird without asking you. Is she strong enough to be told d'you think?"

Vivian sprang out of bed.

"I'll go to her," she muttered. "God, God, God. . . ."

She stole to Clare's room. How was she to tell her?

"What's that? Is that you, Vivian?" Virginia Clare sat up. "Is he worse?" She spoke aloud, but her voice was completely void of tone or emotion.

"Darling, he's quite unconscious, he's not got any pain at all, but. . . ."

"You mean he's dying?"

Vivian was silent.

"Wait for me, I'm coming at once."

Clare stagggered out of bed, and for a moment clutched her head. "All right, don't worry." The two went into Michael's room.

"I've rung up Mr. Abdy," said the nurse.

"Isn't it rather late for that? Surely you could have done something before now, if there was anything to be done?" Clare turned blazing eyes on the woman, but her voice was quiet.

"Yes, Mrs. Bird. But you see there was nothing to be done. I'm sorry. . . ."

Clare went to the side of the bed. Vivian was amazed at her equanimity. She didn't seem to stir, never a muscle of her face moved. Vivian looked at Michael. She had only seen one person dead, her father. There had been something awe-inspiring in that. The elderly ashen-faced man lying there in his bed, the features grim and still. She had felt so much in the presence of death; he was her father, but she had not felt any great misery. This was different; indescribably worse somehow, she thought.

Michael lay there, so still, such a baby, his curly head on the pillow, a soft smile on his face. Five years old—so terribly pretty, Vivian realised—and his life ebbing away from him, quicker—quicker. . . .

How long they stayed she did not know. She looked up and saw Abdy standing beside her, she had been unaware of his entering the room. She saw him beckon to her.

"Get her away," he whispered.

"I can't. How can you ask me to? She must stay until—until . . ."

"He's been dead about a quarter of an hour. She knows. You don't want another one on your hands. Get her to her room and I'll come and give her something."

Vivian tiptoed to where Clare was kneeling.

"Come, my dearest." She tried to raise her from the floor.

"Don't touch me, don't touch me! Leave me with him, leave me—he hasn't got much longer. . . ."

"My dear," Abdy bent towards her, "it's all over."

Clare stared at him.

"Michael's dead, d'you mean?"

They nodded—none of the three had words they could utter. Clare's head sagged, and she fell forward in a dead faint.

. . . . . .

"If only she would cry!"

Vivian was in tears herself as she stood talking to Mr. Abdy outside Clare's room the following day.

"She slept all yesterday and most of the night, after the thing you've given her. But to-day she's just lain there, staring at the wall, saying nothing, eating nothing. Not one tear—I'm so afraid it will go to her brain. She won't even speak to me."

"What about the baby?"

"Nurse has been coping with her. We haven't dared take her into her."

"No, better so. Have you let Mr. Bird know?"

"We wired him. We never know for certain where he is, you know. He mustn't go near her though. It would be fatal."

"Quite. Don't worry too much, Miss Osborne.

Reaction will set in, though the longer it takes, I'm afraid, the worse it will be. Directly after the funeral we must get her away. The funeral is the day after to-morrow. She mustn't know too much about it."

Next day Vivian was sitting in Clare's room. She had barely left her since Michael's death, but Clare had not spoken a word. It was about tea-time—there were footsteps on the landing.

"Who's there?" Clare called. "Come in, whoever's there."

The door opened. It was Deirdre's nurse, with the baby in her arms.

"Oh. . . ." Clare gave an agonising moan. "Take her away, right away, I can't ever see her again—Vivian, d'you hear?—Take her away—take her away, I hate her."

Vivian got up and hustled the indignant nurse and the baby from the room.

"Pore little thing! It's a shame, indeed it is! Never been loved nor wanted from the start, she hasn't, have you, my lovely?"

"Don't you realise that Mrs. Bird is on the verge of a bad breakdown?" said Vivian angrily.

"No one's sorrier than I am, Miss, about pore little Michael, and I know she's feeling it very hard. But she's never been fair to baby, Miss."

She marched into the nursery, and Vivian heard her muttering: "Unnatural . . . people shouldn't have babies. . . ."

She returned to Clare's room; Clare was sobbing as if her heart had broken. Great retching sobs. Vivian took her into her arms, and rocked her like a child, swaying backwards and forwards. "Cry, my sweetheart, cry, it'll make you better." She felt helpless and hopeless; the woman's sorrow was terrifying, she seemed as if she would never

cease. Vivian felt her pent-up misery had been easier to deal with.

"Sh, sh," she began to get frightened. "Stop, dear—dearest, try not to cry so much, you'll get so ill." She pushed her hand on the bell and rang. "Ring up Mr. Abdy and ask him to come at once," she said.

. . . . . .

"I think she'll be easier now." Vivian and Mr. Abdy left the bedroom. "I've given her a strong opiate, the reaction's been heavy. It was bound to set in. It's a good thing; I'm glad you sent for me, though. She ought to sleep right through the night, and I'll come along first thing in the morning."

"What's worrying me," began Vivian, "is the baby. She won't have her near her now. It's not going to be the slightest use, I know."

"'Um. Yes—Luckily it's a very strong child and the nurse is good, isn't she?"

"Oh, yes. She adores Deirdre. And as you know Mrs. Bird has felt very much against having a baby all the time. Resented it because of Michael, because she thought it would take up her time from him—I suppose if he'd been a normal child it would have been different."

"Quite. And, of course, in the unstrung condition she's now in she would be quite likely to take a dislike to it."

Vivian did not say that was already the case. As she opened the front door a telegraph boy came up the path. She took the wire from him and opened it.

"No answer." She turned to Abdy. "This is from Guy Bird. He's arriving some time to-night in London and is coming up. You know the idea was that Mr. Bird would have Deirdre to live with him directly she was old enough to leave Mrs. Bird. Perhaps the solution is here already."

"Judging from all I've heard of Mrs. Bird's husband he's unlikely to saddle himself with a four-months-old baby," Abdy said dryly.

"He's never come up to scratch yet," said Vivian wearily, "but one never knows."

Vivian had finished supper and was just beginning to give up hope of hearing from Guy Bird, when there was a ring at the front door-bell, and a few minutes later Clare's husband came into the room. He looked pale, a little older, Vivian thought, and nervous.

"Well, Guy," she got up to greet him, "I'm glad you've come."

"This is a terribly business, Vivian—I'm—I'm damn sorry. Is Virginia terribly cut up?"

For once his voice sounded worried. Was he perhaps really sorry, Vivian wondered? Or was he afraid he was to be called upon to perform some duty or other that would irk him?

"She's pretty well whacked, Guy. You see the whole thing has been so frightfully sudden. She was wonderful while he was ill, never hysterical or anything of that sort. When he died I got awfully worried; she didn't even cry, for about forty-eight hours she just lay in a sort of stupor, perfectly conscious, but not uttering a sound. To-night she broke down; it's been too awful, I didn't know anyone could cry as she has done. Dr. Abdy had to come round and give her something. I hope to God she'll be all right now."

"Poor Virginia." There was a pause.

"Poor little kid, what was it, Vivian? You never said."

"No one knows properly yet. Some frightful virulent germ that just carried him off. A sort of spinal meningitis as far as I can gather, rather like a form of infantile paralysis."

"I say, Vivian," said Guy, after another pause, "can I have a look at him?"

Vivian was surprised. Surely it was a little late to start parental pride—or affection—whatever Guy's feelings were? She could not refuse him, though.

"Yes, come upstairs. Only be quiet."

She opened the door of the bedroom, Guy tiptoed quietly to where Michael still lay, for all the world like a pretty baby fast asleep, though there was an ethereal look about his little face. She looked out of the window while Bird gazed on the features of his small son. Presently she heard him move, she was surprised to see tears in his eyes.

"Poor little kid," he spoke gruffly, "he's had a pretty rough deal, born deaf and dumb and now to end it like this." They went out of the room and downstairs in silence.

"Vivian, I've been a swine, I know. Is there any way at all in which I can help? I should like to very much."

Vivian had an instant's fear that he was going to suggest taking Clare away; it would be the average man's idea of recompense she knew.

"Oh, don't worry that I shall try and butt in on Virginia. Michael was my son, I know, but I've not behaved in any way as his father. She's had enough misery through me already! I want—if I can—to help her."

Vivian looked at him. Very different he seemed from those other times when he had stood arrogant, brutal, selfish to the core. Perhaps there was good in him. After all, Clare had loved him once. . . .

"How's my daughter, by the way?" he asked. Vivian felt she would put him to the test.

"I don't know if you will understand this," she said, "but Virginia can't bear to have her near her now. You see, Michael was everything to her and . . ."

"Yes, of course, I quite understand. And I said she

would come to me, didn't I?" He laughed bitterly. "I suppose this is obviously the time," he said. "What I'm going to do with a small daughter I can't think! Has she got a good nurse?"

"Yes," Vivian said, "she's devoted to her—she came when Deirdre was just a month old. She'd be perfectly safe with her."

"Deirdre? Our Lady of the Sorrows, what? How like Virginia. Well, Vivian, thank you for being civil to me."

"Oh—why——"

"Oh, no—I'm a cad. I know. I shan't see Virginia again, I don't suppose. You'll let me know, I daresay, if she wants to do anything? Divorce, I mean. Funny—I don't bear you a grudge any longer."

"You know you have no real reason to, Guy. I've looked after Virginia, given her my devotion, and will always do so; but that's all. I want you always to realise that. Not because I care for what you should think of me, of my attitude to certain things, but in respect to your wife, please."

"I believe you. I've never believed anything else of her. My ice Madonna—mine no longer, alas."

"Would you care for a drink or anything before you go?" Vivian asked.

"No, thanks. I'll get along now. I'll be staying at my club if you want to arrange things about the baby joining me. What about the funeral, by the way? I'd like to go, if Virginia won't be there?"

"No, I shan't let her go. I'll get Abdy to keep her under drugs for a day or two. It would kill her, I think. I'll come round to-morrow sometime and let you know various plans, Guy—the funeral's the day after."

She took him to the door.

"Good night," and she held out her hand.

XIV

Vivian put down her book and looked across at Clare. Sometimes she wondered if she would ever see a smile on her face again. It was now five months since Michael's death. After the first terrible onslaught of her misery Clare had never mentioned his name. Vivian asked her to come away, she agreed without enthusiasm, without relief, she seemed to put herself in Vivian's care, to exist merely. She did not attempt to work, and Vivian knew she never opened a book. Deirdre was sent to Guy—he took a flat in Regent's Park for her and her nurse, and told Vivian he was really going to settle down and throw off his past life of selfishness and instability.

Vivian took Clare to Egypt. It was not a great success. The museums and tombs at Luxor and Assouan, which in ordinary events would have roused her to the greatest interest and excitement, left her cold. Cairo bored her, she found it frankly tawdry. They moved in January to Sicily, but the weather was none too warm. The beauty of Taormina, the ancient wonder of Syracuse and Girgenti, failed to rouse her from the lethargy into which she seemed to have fallen. She started to take an interest in making tapestry—Petit Point. Vivian used to search the highways and by-ways of the towns they visited trying to find new pieces for her. She grew very dependent on the younger girl, seeming to take fright if Vivian left her for so much as a couple of hours. Yet when Vivian was there she would sometimes sit for hours without saying a word.

She shunned other people as though they were plague-stricken. Then one day in February she had told Vivian she would like to go back to Capri. Vivian had been astonished. Hadn't she spent a lot of her married life with Guy there? Wouldn't it wake memories? Clare thought it wouldn't. She sometimes connected Guy with Capri, but never Capri with Guy. It was so lovely there, she told Vivian, she would like to show her the island. So to Capri they went. They only stayed a night in Naples, for Clare seemed anxious to push on.

The two hours' crossing in the little boat had been made on a hot March morning. The blueness of the sea and sky was indescribable, and standing on the little deck, Vivian saw Vesuvius for the first time.

"We stop at Sorrento first," said Clare. "Look, there's Capri, and the island right over there," she pointed in another direction, "is Ischia."

"Are you really pleased to be coming back here?" asked Vivian.

"Yes. I feel as though I were coming home. Capri gets you, like a drug."

They arrived at the island shortly before midday; most of the passengers were bundled off in small rowing-boats—there was no quayside large enough for the steamer, small as she was. Vivian noticed a few people remained on board.

"Tourists probably," explained Clare. "Going to see the Blue Grotto. We can do that some other time, if you want to."

At first sight Vivian had felt just a small twinge of disappointment. It seemed like a vast mountainous rock, a few houses scattered here and there on the slopes. As she drew nearer she realised the quaintness of the houses along the Grande Marina, pink, blue, completely Italian, typical fisher-dwellings. Rows and rows of little brightly

painted blue and green rowing-boats were scattered along the quay-side. They were greeted on all sides by numbers of porters, all bearing the labels of different hotels on their caps, all carrying umbrellas. They screamed and yelled the names of the various hotels and pensions.

"Where do we go?" asked Vivian. "Up this little street? There seems to be hotels along here."

"Oh, no, they're nothing very much. We get into the funicular, and go up to Capri itself."

They passed a dozen or so women who pressed them to buy corals, and highly coloured post cards, and entrancing beads.

"Come on, Vivian. All junk! Wait till we get to the Piazza."

Women staggered past them carrying gigantic trunks upon their heads.

"Good Lord! look at them," Vivian gasped, "how can the men let them?"

"They're used to it. They think nothing of it. As a matter of fact, although they look so worn and shabby, those female porters think they're cut above ordinary servants."

Vivian gave gasps of delight as the little train climbed higher and higher to its destination. Houses of all colours, white, pink, yellow, with green shutters and blue Italian-looking houses, Moorish houses, rose up on all sides. The little gardens were thick with orange trees. Presently they reached the station, Vivian took Clare's arm, and together they walked out on to the terrace.

"I can't believe it's true. It's like a setting for some opera, or a fairy story," she said.

The pillars gleamed white in the brilliant sunshine. She went to the edge—the Bay of Naples stretched for miles, the city in the heat haze of midday, but the mountains proud and fearless, and Vesuvius with his ever spouting smoke, King of them all.

"It's nearly twenty miles across the bay," said Clare, "yet at times it seems as though one could almost swim to Naples. Look at those sailing ships."

And Vivian saw in the distance small specks that were full-rigged sailing ships, their yards white and gleaming in the sun.

"Off to Greece with merchandise," Clare said.

Three or four gaily decked *carrozzas* stood at the far end of the terrace.

"Oh, let's get in one," begged Vivian.

"Not now. They're not allowed the way we have to go, the streets are too narrow. The hotel is only round the corner, too."

They moved into the little square piazza, and Vivian held her breath with joy at the brightly decked shops, each one's goods so fully displayed in the windows and open doorways. Striped scarves and rugs were there, laces, exaggerated coloured post cards, pottery and china, wine shops with *fiascos* of Chianti and Orvieto dangling from big hooks, fruiterers that seemed to have amassed the whole of the island's wealth of oranges and tangerines, freshly plucked, the leaves still green upon them. Little knots of people stood gossiping in groups. Peasants, soldiers, Fascisti, priests. A monk came down the cathedral steps—there was everywhere the hum and buzz of life, happiness, enthusiasm.

"They all gather here at midday to see the boat come in, and then some of them have drinks here and there," said Clare. "That is Morgano's," she passed a café on their left. "We'll go there a lot, I expect." And she led the way to the hotel at the end of the street.

Days grew into weeks, no mention was made of their leaving the island. The place seemed to grow into their very veins. After a week or two, Clare suggested they should leave the big hotel and either move into a villa or

into a small *penzione*, somewhere where they would be more to themselves. Vivian found a self-contained flat on the Via Tragara, and the two moved in. The little balcony outside their windows was hung with clematis and wistaria. They would bask all the morning, sun-bathing, and after *collazione* take a *carrozza* to the Piccole Marina and spend the rest of the day bathing. Sometimes when the clouds settled on the mountain and it was no weather for basking or bathing, Clare would take Vivian wandering over the island, to explore the never-ending sources of beauty and new interest. One long week-end they spent on the heights at Anacapri, but the solitude depressed Clare, and Vivian was glad when they returned.

Vivian was happy, the peace of their lives seemed as though it would never be disturbed again. There was gaiety, too, in the little town, on the Piazza and in the tiny streets and alleys. In the café she and Clare would sip *apéritifs* before dining and sometimes linger late into the night, watching the motley gatherings, writers, painters, dilettanti, as they drank and diced. There were several people Clare knew, people who had lived in Capri when she had been there before.

If only the look of eternal sorrow would lift from Clare's face, thought Vivian, watching her as she lay, looking out to sea.

"Five months. Exactly five months."

Clare's voice sounded far away as she spoke. Vivian started.

"Michael's been dead five months to-day. I never speak of him, Vivian, do I? D'you wonder why?"

"When one has been as unhappy as you have been it's not surprising you should be silent about it."

"It's not that I feel I can't talk about it. It's because if I started to think, I should go mad. Mad with anger. So

from the first moment I made a vow not to talk about it, not to think about it. It's no better—worse, in fact. It's killed something in me, my sense of balance, I believe. I can't think straight any longer. I've lost the things, like religion, that meant so much to me, and I don't care a damn about the ugly, sordid, disgusting things."

" My dear." Vivian had no words to reply.

" Life is pointless to me now. I've never done a really bad thing, an evil thing, in my life. Did you know that, Vivian?"

" Of course you haven't," Vivian answered.

" Not because I was frightened of the future or because my religion told me A was definitely right, and B definitely wrong. I simply didn't want to do otherwise. Well, that's all over and done with. I realise it makes no difference."

" You're bitter, my dear—that's all. And that's a thing that happens to most people after they've gone through sorrow. It's not surprising, you're not unique."

" Is that all? You're trying to help me, Vivian. I know that once upon a time I wasn't such a bad sort, really, and now my only wish in life is to hurt somebody as much as I've been hurt."

" But that's terrible," said Vivian. " Besides you don't mean it, not really, you can't. You're not that type of person a bit."

" That's where you're wrong. Don't you see we never know ourselves until we've come up against something? I thought I'd come up against quite a bit, and it never destroyed anything very much in me. But you see I was wrong. And if this has been the big thing to test me, then I haven't withstood it, that's all."

There was a long silence. Both women turned to their books; neither of them read much.

" Why strike at me through Michael? I can never forgive God for that."

"Darling, don't you think that many people might feel like that when their children die?"

"Perhaps. I don't know. Lots of people don't believe in God, anyway. If they don't it's better for them."

"Don't," Vivian cried.

"If He's any feeling for me, then I'm going to show Him I don't care. It all means nothing, but I'm going to hurt Him."

"How can you hurt God?" Vivian asked.

"By doing things I know to be wrong. By hurting defenceless people. I shan't mind."

Vivian looked across at Clare. She could not believe this was the woman she'd known and loved. There was something infinitely pathetic, infinitely tragic about her. She felt frightened. It was as though some devil had entered into Clare's soul. Yes, she was frightened, frightened for herself—for the first time since she had known Virginia Clare. She knew she had the power now to destroy them both. How, she did not know, but some sixth sense told her so.

"Vivian, do you still love me?"

"Of course. You know I do. Why ask a question like that?"

There was danger in the air.

"All the time you've known me you've been very good about things, haven't you?"

"I don't know what you mean," stammered Vivian.

"No? Guy told me ages ago."

"Guy? Told you that I—that I——"

"Yes," said Clare. She looked at Vivian, a long look from those green eyes, kissed her and walked quietly indoors.

During dinner Clare seemed more normal again. Nothing was said about the afternoon's conversation.

"I'm going to Morgano's." It was nearly ten o'clock. Vivian looked up surprised.

"Why? You hardly ever go as late as this. Aren't you tired this evening?"

"No—come, too. We shall see the crowd, and I feel I want waking up. Will you mind if I drink a lót?" She spoke with a laugh, but there was no mirth behind it. Vivian looked at her uncertainly.

"It doesn't generally amuse you to drink, does it?" she asked.

"No. But perhaps I've changed my mind. I believe it's quite a popular way of amusing oneself. I might try it myself for once! The trouble is that I'll have to take such a hell of a lot to get drunk."

"D'you want to get drunk? Why?"

"Oh, God, Vivian! What questions! Do I have to have your permission then?"

The girl was silent. Here was something new—a Clare she had not met. Someone who might easily become openly hostile. What would be the best way to deal with her?

"Go on to Morgano's then. I daresay you'll find it amusing. I shan't come."

"Oh. Going to let me go alone?"

"Why not?"

"It's unlike you, that's all."

"It's unlike you to want to go and soak yourself in drink, I gather that's your bent to-night. Not a very pretty one. I don't want to see you spoilt, particularly."

"Isn't that rather selfish?"

"Not more so than deliberately going out to get tight when you know how much I shall hate it. At least, I don't think so."

"Bit of a prig to-night, aren't you, Vivian?"

"I believe you want to quarrel with me, Clare. You can try till the cows come home. I've a lot of control."

"You're right! I don't call it control, though."

Vivian remained silent.

"All these months you've been fostering inhibitions in your mind, wanting or pretending to want something you felt would never come your way. I know. You've simply not got the guts to try, have you? That's funk, my dear, not self-control."

Vivian knew that Clare was deliberately trying to hurt her. She determined to take no notice. The things she said were hurting her—damnably. But she was not going to show it. She realised that she was to be first victim of Clare's onslaught to hurt—if she was going through with her plan.

"Go along then, my dear. Enjoy yourself." She tried to speak calmly. The door banged, she heard Clare go to her room. Oh, God, take care of her! she prayed. Don't let her do something silly.

Presently the door opened and Clare looked in. She wore no hat, just a striped scarf across her shoulders, and a cigarette hung from her lips. She looked very beautiful, thought Vivian, and very hopeless.

"Well, I'm off to my orgy! You'll know where to find me if you change your mind." She laughed, and went out of the house.

. . . . . .

Vivian looked at her watch. It was nearly two o'clock. She could stand it no longer. She must go and find Clare. She pulled on a hat and ran out of the house. All the way to the café her heart beat so loud she thought it must wake the sleepers in the houses she passed. How would she find Clare? Or worse, supposing she did not find her. She ran up the hill, to find the café shut. She rapped on the shutters, banged on the door. Presently a head looked out of a window.

"*Dove la signora Virginia Clare?*" she asked, struggling to keep the appalling anxiety from her voice.

"Eh? *Non sono, non sono.*"

She cursed herself for her scanty knowledge of the language.

"Can you understand English?" she asked, in desperation.

"*Scusi—non capisco.*"

"Oh, God, in your infinite mercy, help me," she breathed, as she heard the window shut.

At that moment she heard unsteady steps approaching. She crept into the shadow of the wall. They were a man's footsteps, and she had no wish to be accosted by a sodden Italian at this hour. As the man lurched round the corner from the piazza the moon fell on his face and she recognised him. It was Giovanni d'Istrali, one of the 'crowd'—perhaps he would know where Clare was.

"Signor d'Istrali," she ran out into the light.

"Signorina Osborne"—in trying to take off his cap, the young man stumbled, and clutched on to Vivian's arm to prevent himself from falling.

"*Scusi, scusi,*" he started to giggle feebly, amiably.

"Have you seen Virginia Clare?"

"I dunno—'ave I seen 'er? I have seen so many peoples to-night." He started to laugh.

"Pull yourself together and try and think." Vivian took his arm and started to shake him.

"Virgeenia? Virgeenia? Yes—I have seen 'er. She ees weez Rena, up at La Citella. Yes—you go, you find her zere."

"You're sure?"

"Eh? I say you find 'er. Like me!" He fell into a state of collapse. "Verry dronk! Verry dronk! *La bella* Virgeenia." He started to hiccough. "I must leave you, yes?" he said. "*Buona serra*—Goo-nigh." He started to roll down the hill.

Vivian started to walk quickly. Thank God it wasn't far.

She ran up the cathedral steps, through into the narrow alley, and presently found herself outside Rèna's villa. She rang the bell—waited three minutes, five minutes. No one came. Useless to ring again. The servants had all gone to bed, obviously. The guests, if there were any, were probably too drunk to hear the bell. She pushed the handle of the door, and to her surprise she found it open.

There was a deathly silence in the bleak marble hall, but a light was burning, and another from the landing upstairs. She crept upstairs to Rèna's *salon*, where she imagined they would be, and opened the door. Three men lay with their heads on the table, their bodies half off the chairs on which they sat. Bottles, empty ones, and several broken and upturned glasses were scattered in different parts of the room. A woman, whom Vivian recognised as Cornelia d'Unanziano, lay on the rug in a doped stupor. There was her famous pipe that Vivian had heard of, never seen and not believed in, falling out of her mouth.

She looked round the room, on the divan lay Rèna, white, ugly, sodden, her arm round Clare, who was not unconscious, and was sitting propped against Rèna, dazedly stroking the curly head of Lambert Queen, who was lying across her lap. When Clare looked up and saw Vivian, she started to giggle.

"Hullo." Her voice sounded stiff and a little thick. "Come to bring me home?"

"Yes, come along, darling." Vivian could not be angry, she knew she was powerless to scold. Clare, for all her years, looked so young, so out of the picture, among this group of drink-sodden decadents.

"Here, give me your hand."

"Can't move," muttered Clare. She started to giggle again, and bent and kissed Lambert Queen's curls.

"Don't waste your time kissing that tight little ——," said Vivian angrily, "and pull yourself together and come on."

Clare made a movement, rolling over, and fell off the divan. Queen grunted and went on sleeping. No movement at all came from Rèna.

"She looks dead," said Clare quietly, looking down at the white face, and swaying.

"Dead drunk, that's all."

She put her arm round Clare's waist and gradually got her downstairs and out into the street. The chill air of the night made Clare shiver. She clutched Vivian's arm, stumbling every step or two.

"Enjoy it?" asked Vivian bitterly, thinking of her own evening of anxiety and misery.

"'An' the wages of sin is death,'" laughed Clare, and a moment later started to cry.

"All right, don't be silly. I'm here. You're all right now."

"Dear Vivian, darling Vivian, did you wonder where I was?"

"Yes, I did," she answered shortly. "I went to Morgano's—it was shut. Nobody understood my Italian—luckily I met Giovanni and he told me where you were."

"Giovanni—Giovanni—he tried to make love to me."

"I shouldn't think he succeeded seeing the state he was in," said Vivian brutally.

"No. Poor Giovanni—his luck was out. Somebody else . . ." She stopped.

"What?" Vivian stopped.

"Oh, come on. I'm so tired." Clare started to cry again.

"You're very drunk, that's what's the matter with you."

"If you had come I shouldn't have done it," Clare started.

"That's right! Blame me!"

"Oh, you fool," said Clare wearily, and relapsed into silence.

They walked on in silence till they reached home. Vivian noticed that Clare stumbled less, that her sobs had stopped.

"I feel better," she remarked, as Vivian opened the door. "Now for the test." She put her hand on the banister and gingerly, step by step, mounted the stairs.

"There," she uttered with satisfaction, as she reached the top, "take back all you said, my dear! Could a drunkard manage that?"

Vivian went to her own room and took her clothes off, she felt desperately tired. When she was ready to get into bed she remembered Clare. She went across the passage, and knocked on the door. No answer. Vivian opened it. Clare lay in bed—no light in the room but the streaming moonlight from the window. Vivian went across and sat beside her. She saw two tears glisten in Clare's eyes.

"Don't cry, my dearest." All anger had left her now. Only pity remained, and the love that she knew would be in her heart always.

. . . . . .

In the morning Vivian crept quietly about the house. She did not want to disturb Clare. She told Maria, when she was called with her coffee, not to wake her. Later in the morning she went down to bathe at the Piccola Marina. There was a stillness in the house when she got back. Could Clare be still asleep? And Maria, where was she? In her room was a note, addressed to her—in Clare's writing. She suddenly felt very sick. Tremblingly she opened it.

'DARLING,

'I'm going away for a bit. After my disgusting exhibition last night I cannot face you. I don't know what has happened to me, I seem to have gone to pieces. Try to understand, and as always, be patient with me. I said foul and unforgivable things to you. Surely I cannot have meant them? Oh, God! Vivian, *I don't know*.

'I cannot be grateful enough to you for your love, but I must leave you.

'CLARE.'

The shock of Clare's letter was so great that for some time Vivian was stunned. Was this the end? No, by God—not if it meant searching for her the wide world over. Clare would be in Naples this evening, so would she. When Maria returned Vivian saw at once that the woman had known nothing of Clare's departure. She had been marketing, and indeed Clare had taken very little luggage with her—her room was still strewn with her belongings.

"Listen, Maria. La Signora has had to go to Naples on important business. Understand?" The woman nodded.

"I must follow her to-day. I'll leave you money and leave my things here, and write to you from Naples. Is that all right?"

Vivian arranged with Pietro Pasti, who owned a large and fairly efficient motor-boat, to take her to Naples. The weather was beautifully calm, and for an inordinate sum Pietro agreed to take her.

"You go to follow the other *Inglese*—she who go dis morning in la Capitano Zenani's motor-boat?"

"Yes. She got off all right, then?"

So worried had she been that she had not stopped to wonder how Virginia Clare had left the island, for the steamer left in the afternoon.

When they arrived at Naples Vivian went straight to the hotel where she knew Clare always stayed. They had not seen her. She rang up Cooks, the American Express—she could learn nothing. She made officials find out from the stations if there was any news of her, and here, too, she drew a blank. Was she perhaps hiding in Naples? Unlikely, as were the ideas of her retreating to Sorrento, Amalfi, or any other of the places near. The steamship offices were asked, but no one of her name or answering to any description of her could be found by them. Vivian waited on in Naples, three days, four days. Her mind a haze of unrest, sleepless nights, blank misery.

The fourth day she picked up a copy of the Continental *Daily Mail*. She saw the headlines. 'Another Air Disaster.' She started to read it.

'A private plane, thought to be flying from Rome to Paris, caught fire and was completely destroyed yesterday. It is thought an explosion must have taken place in the petrol tank. The occupants, four in number, all perished.

'The plane is believed to have belonged to Lieutenant Lambert Queen, an American living in Naples and Capri, who was piloting her when the disaster took place. Lieutenant Queen is known to have left Naples three days ago. The names of the other passengers have not yet been discovered—and the bodies are unrecognisable. A woman is believed to have been among them. The only clues to the identities of the ill-fated fliers are a gold watch and chain with the inscription F.M.P.–T.M.P., 1918, and an identification bracelet with the initials V.C.'

Vivian read no more. She got up, and looked wildly about her. Then the room turned black, and she fell with a crash to the ground.

Diary Extract

DIARY EXTRACT

THREE years ago to-day. I wonder if it will ever leave me. The horror, and agony, and sorrow. Funny that at my age—I'm not thirty yet—life seems utterly pointless. If only it hadn't been the end it was. An end brought on by misunderstanding, as it were. Three years—what's time anyway? At first it used to be 'so many months to-day'—then 'one year'—so many endless damned days. I wonder, I've often wondered, what people must have thought about me those first few weeks. Odd that I can't remember anything, never could remember. Oh, I can't go on thinking. I mustn't, I shall go mad. Mad—if only I could. It's my awful sanity that keeps me from doing obvious things. What's the point of killing myself? I don't see any point in anything, life or death, they may just as well take their course with me, either way. Religion, I'm glad I've that. Because it does mean something. Oh, I am thankful her death hasn't turned that into ashes for me, as Michael's did for her. It's been the only thing really that's meant anything. I've come back to it, I suppose, because for a time I rather ignored it.

Oh, Clare, Clare, Clare——

I wonder what's become of Richard. Dear Richard. It's a year, more, since he wrote. Shall I write to him, ask him to come and see me? A grand heart—and nature—Richard's. . . . Wonder what on earth he saw in me. I nearly fell in love with him, I believe. In love—Oh, no, surely not. No, I'm the sort of creature that will love

once in their lifetime. And the memory of every minute of our time together will stay with me till I die, too. It's a relief to think about things—write about them. My journal—oh, if only someone had been with me on my travels. Someone. . . . (Only you, my dear, only you.)

India—no, I don't believe you'd have enjoyed India. Did I? Everyone was terribly kind, of course, the shoots were good fun. It was interesting, too, Madras—my God. I shall always remember the awful things Amy Tyrrell told me, and showed me. Such children. . . . No, India would have frightened you. Japan was good, though, and Honolulu. That was where I wanted you most—in Honolulu. A place made for two people, or for one if that one sits and thinks, thinks, thinks. That's what I did, and you tortured my thoughts and I could not stay. I've been to lots of places, Australia—no, Aunt Julia was difficult enough in England when I was a child, she was worse out there. But it was interesting, I suppose. And back—Africa. I suppose Africa meant more than any other place to me. The bigness of it would have enthralled you so. Uganda—yes, that was life. But how could I, young and alone, stay there for ever. Only if I'd married Bill Hewitt, and that would have ruined everything, all the beauty.

Here instead—Dulbridge. You are with me here, by me. I don't feel so utterly bereft, and I have my dogs, my garden, my horses, my moors. And here I shall remain. I've seen the world—as much of it as I want to—I'm not happy away from the places where you were with me. I shall stay. I can never go to Italy again.

Oh, God, God, keep me from remembering the end.

PART TWO

I

'My Dear,

'I arrive in England the day after to-morrow, so by the time you get this I shall be somewhere near you. If you're at home may I come and see you? If you're in town be an angel and ring me at my club.

'It seems a hell of a time since I've heard anything of you. I've been in Canada for the last ten months. Please, Vivian, let's meet soon.

'As ever,

'R.'

Richard back again. Vivian wondered if he'd altered at all. It would be nice to see him again.

She picked up the directory, and looked up the number of his club. Poor Richard, he had come home expecting to see the girl he once knew, and loved, and was returning to find a spinster, an old maid—Vivian smiled—a rather dull woman, old before she'd realised the fullness of youth, an old young woman living in herself, her animals and her memories.

"Hullo, is that Gerrard 44447? Is Mr. Richard Hemmingway there? Yes, I'll hold the line." It was odd, she felt, that no emotion of any sort passed through her. Surely she would be glad to see him? Could she feel no more excitement than if she were ringing up some department at Harrods?

"Who's there?" came his voice, and she knew she was glad.

"Richard? It's Vivian."

"My dear—I never expected to hear from you as soon as this. Where are you?"

"I'm up in town, at my club. I got your letter this morning."

"I say, this is grand. When can I see you? Can you come and have some lunch with me?"

"I'd love to, Richard."

"Meet me at Ciro's at one, then. Will that be O.K. for you?"

"Perfect. Oh, Richard, it will be fun to see you again."

She rang off. She meant it when she said it would be fun. She walked across to the window, flung it open, smelt the spring freshness. Outside a man was selling daffodils—spring. There was spring in the air. Once more she caught sight of herself in the mirror, why, there was a flush in her cheeks. What a fool, she thought, and laughed. Oh, heavens, what fun to laugh once more. What could it be? Lunching with a man I knew, and—liked, years ago? Or is it because it's spring, and a bright sun and a blue sky? I shall go to Fortnum and Mason's and buy a new hat. . . .

It had been a long time since Vivian had taken very much interest in the clothes she wore. She bought new ones every now and then because one had to have clothes to wear, and as she was well off they were good ones. But not for a long time had she taken such a time to choose a hat, and then passing a woman who was being sprayed with some perfume, she had to have some, too. "Something about silver foxes," she said to herself, "they need a scent." In Piccadilly a man was selling button-holes, violets, lilies-of-the-valley, and he had one gardenia left.

"I'll have that," she told him.

At two minutes past one Vivian walked up the steps of

Ciro's. The walk had brought a further flush to her cheeks. Richard Hemmingway was inside waiting for her.

"My dear—this is *fine*, after all these years."

"Oh, Richard!" He looked exactly the same as when she last saw him. A bit bigger, broader, perhaps.

"What'll you have to drink; like it here, in the bar, or at the table?" he asked her.

It was great, he told himself, to see her.

"Oh, let's go straight in," she begged.

What a lunch it was. How they talked—and laughed—what fun it was.

"Well, Vivian, when am I going to see you again? Can't you dine with me to-morrow—you're not going back to Devonshire yet again?"

"Of course I will, Richard."

"I know—we'll make a night of it, dine early, do a theatre and then go and have some supper somewhere."

Vivian could not remember when she had felt so gay, so carefree. Perhaps she never had. Oh, maybe long, long ago, so long ago it seemed, in Switzerland, with Richard Hemmingway then, too.

"Have you got your car in town with you?" he asked.

"Yes. I've a Bentley since you last saw me. What's yours?"

"Oh, still the old Hispano. Vivian, what d'you say to a day in the country? We can lunch at that place near Egham, and then go for a real walk. This weather's so darn good it seems a shame to go wasting one's time in theatres and restaurants and cinemas."

"Oh, do let's. Let's go on Sunday. Great Fosters is the place you mean. I went years ago with Clare."

She stopped, there was a pause. It was the first time either of them had mentioned her name. Then:

"Well, we'll do it on Sunday. If you really would like to," Richard said.

. . . . . .

Vivian sat on a stile, swinging her legs slowly. Richard was leaning against the gate close by. Somewhere in the distance a clock chimed, and both of them subconsciously looked at their watches. Four o'clock. Four o'clock on a late March Sunday. There had been many frosty nights, the furrows in the lane were ridged and hard. Old decayed oak leaves from the wood close by carpeted the banks; Vivian noticed a couple of snowdrops peeping from the base of a tree-trunk. Peace everywhere, and no one about. She sniffed and lazily realised the smell of wood-smoke in the air.

"You wouldn't think it was so near London, really, would you?" and she stretched.

Richard said nothing, and began to knock the ash from his pipe.

"Oh, we needn't go yet, need we?" she asked. "It's so calm and lovely. I feel so lazy and happy. I don't know why I come to London."

Hemmingway looked at her.

"Vivian, will you marry me?"

She turned to him, slowly, thoughtfully.

"Why?" she asked.

"Why? Well. . . ."

"I mean . . . Richard, years ago you asked me to marry you. I nearly did. Then, well—you know what happened. Except for a few letters—very few—you've seen me only once—two, three years ago, I forget. And now I feel you're asking me to marry you because for a week we've seen each other every day, and you think I may expect it."

"Does that mean that you won't?" She tried to find

traces of relief in his voice, but could not; only disappointment. How could she marry him? She knew she cared about him, loved him. But marriage entailed so many things. Things she felt she was past, things which were strange to her, and which she felt she was too old to begin. Old at thirty? Rather nonsense; many women married much later than that, and most or many were virtuous women who certainly felt that some things were better late than never. But then how many had known. . . . If she only wanted to marry! To-day she felt young, happy, as she always did when Richard took her out. Perhaps life with Richard would keep her young after all. Life, marriage, a line of Browning's ran through her mind:

> "The little more how much it is,
> The little less, what worlds away."

Never to be lonely any more, to belong to somebody.

"Well?" Hemmingway's voice came to her as though from far away.

"What'll you do if I say I—can't?" He paused.

"I should go back. To Canada. They want someone out there really."

"And leave your job in Paris?"

"I could probably get a permanent transfer to Quebec. I could do both then. After all, I've been out there so much the last few years, I really feel I'm better suited there now."

"I see." She knew by the sound of his voice that he meant it. That if she let him go he would go for ever. Could she risk that? And then she knew what further loneliness would be. She could not let him leave her.

"And if I marry you, what then?"

"Then I should let you decide where you wanted the rest of our lives to be spent. Oh, Vivian, my dearest, think; think well before you turn me down this time. You see, dear, this time it will be different."

"I know. I don't quite know why. Tell me."

He took her hand.

"I went away five years ago, and left a girl, a strange, rather tragic girl, who had somehow wrung from my heart——"

"Pity," said Vivian.

"Call it that if you like. I fell in love with her, though. Well, you know what happened and why I left. And I told you to let me help you—always. You've never asked me to, I guess you've never wanted me. When I heard of your friend's ghastly tragedy I came to you, but you were too ill and unstrung for me to be of any use. I left you because you asked me to. As you say, our letters have been few. But this time I've seen you, more of you than I'd dreamed possible. You're not a girl any longer, Vivian, you're a woman, and I want you more than I've wanted anything in my life. God knows I loved you before, but a man's love for a girl and his love for a woman are different. Before, I wanted to look after you, take away the unhappy look in your eyes, spoil you. You were an unhappy child to me, but a strange one. Something like Tessa in that book called *The Constant Nymph*."

"Oh, Richard," Vivian smiled, "you do flatter me. Anything less like——"

"Well, that's how you struck me. But now, well, I know I can't take anything from your eyes, and I want your companionship, and friendship and love. I don't see why you should say 'yes,' I don't even ask if you love me, because I know damn well you don't. But I love you so terribly, and I want you so frightfully. If I go this time it's good-bye, because I can't do otherwise. I'm a man and . . ."

"Richard, I'm fond of you. I think I love you. I love you too much to let you go away and never see you any

more. You know me, all about me; I don't know if I can make you any sort of a wife. But for that brief moment in Switzerland, I've never given marriage a thought. But—I will marry you."

"My darling!" He took her upturned hand in his and kissed it.

They walked back a mile to where they had left the car, neither of them speaking.

"You drive," she said, when they reached the Bentley.

They spoke very little on their way back. Vivian slipped her arm through his and sighed.

"Tired?" he asked.

"Only happy," she replied.

"Will you take me straight back?" she asked him presently.

"Won't you come out to-night?"

"Will you think me an awful pig if I don't?" she enquired.

"No—of course not."

The start of the Great West Road. Hammersmith—Kensington—the Park—back to Curzon Street; Hemmingway brought the car to a standstill in a dark side turning.

"I want to kiss you—please."

"Why, if you want to."

"Don't you want me to?"

"Don't let's be silly," she laughed, "only be quick before anyone comes."

"Darling. . . ."

. . . . . .

Vivian Osborne became Vivian Hemmingway a week later. They were married by the Registrar in Prince's Row, a friend of Richard's was the only witness they knew, and afterwards the two left for Biarritz.

II

VIVIAN sat on a low hearth-stool, her face cupped in her hands, staring into the fire. She had been having tea by herself, and soon Richard would be home. It was winter time, and as she brought her head round to listen, the smell of toasted muffins reached her nose. Life was peaceful and secure nowadays. She was happy in her little house in Chelsea. It had been a relief when Richard had been transferred to London. Those summer weeks in Paris had been pleasant, but she always felt alien to the city, and their flat in the Avenue Victor Hugo, charming and luxurious as it was, would never be home to her. Turning, she looked with new eyes, as it were, at the little room she loved as her own. Low-ceilinged, soft white panelled walls, comfortable arm-chairs and a sofa covered in gaily patterned chintz. Chintz curtains, drawn, and the firelight playing its reflection upon them. Only the one lamp was burning; how cosy it all was, she thought, throwing another log on to the fire. The bullfinch in the corner of the room, hearing the noise, stopped his piping. There was a scratching at the door and Toby, an old spaniel, meandered in and flopped beside her with a beseeching look in his eyes to have his head scratched for him.

The firelight threw flickering shadows on the ceiling—dancing shadows, like ghosts. Ghosts—she shivered; the past—how far away. Had she lived that other life? Past, present, future; the past was over—she remembered a gramophone record, a song, the dreary wailing of an

American actress, 'It's over, all over.' Why did one change oneself with the changing of one's name? It seemed as though one was reincarnated somehow. And the future? And she remembered that the most astonishing and amazing work of nature was already working in her. Her child. She was going to have a child. A child for Vivian Osborne—no, Vivian Hemmingway, a vast difference. What would Richard say, she wondered. She supposed he would be pleased. Dear Richard, it was something she could do for him. But a child for her—unthinkable. . . . Perhaps it was a dream, but she knew it wasn't. In January she was already three months gone, the doctor had said. That meant sometime in July. She hoped it would be a boy.

Vivian blinked and got up, stretched, and lit a cigarette. She saw herself, three-quarter length, in the mirror that was hanging on the wall. No, you could see no signs of approaching motherhood yet. She stared and drew her hands across her figure. Held her breasts, felt them, and fell once more to wondering. She felt no great emotion, no sudden surging of maternal love or pride. It was almost as though she was above herself, looking down at what was about to happen to her. She hoped she would love him, be a good mother to him. The idea of her child being a daughter did not really strike her. She would love him, of course—she loved all helpless things, small children, dogs, kittens, horses. But it would be much more Richard's child than hers, she knew it would mean so much more to him than to her.

She fell to thinking of Richard. He loved her so much, too much. If only she loved him like that. She gave him all that he wanted, all, that is, that he thought she had to give. But that little more. . . . Ah, how much, how much, and how much—only she knew. Her child would be born

of love, of peace, of friendship. Perhaps it would be better for it. Perhaps children conceived in utter and overwhelming passion were given a difficult start in life. There was probably something to be said for pre-natal influence.

She heard a key in the lock, and then Richard's voice calling her.

"In, sweetness?"

"I'm in here," she answered.

"Just going to have a wash, and I'll be with you in a minute."

She went back to the fire, picked up her library book and sat down. Richard Hemmingway came in, carrying the decanter of sherry and glasses.

"How are you?" and he bent down and kissed the top of her head.

"Fine," she smiled. "Had a good day?"

"Grand. Managed to get in a game of squash for half an hour as well." He poured himself out a drink.

"Want one?"

She shook her head.

"Anything interesting in the paper?" she asked.

Hemmingway sat on the firestool and opened the evening paper. Vivian came and sat beside him, her arm through his. They read, talked a bit, smoked.

"Well, I must be getting along. I think I'll have a bath," and Richard got up and walked across the room.

"Richard, come here. I've got a bit of news for you."

"Oh, what's that?"

"Richard, I'm going to have a baby."

She watched the effect of her words on his face.

"Vivian—Vivian——"

He strode across the room and pulled her to him.

"Oh, my darling, my darling!" He bent to kiss her, and was unaware that she gave him her cheek.

"I'm so glad, Richard, that you're so pleased."

"Darling, I'm so terribly grateful."

"Grateful!" she laughed. "Well, I don't know about that."

"Tell me you're happy, too," he begged.

"Why, of course. I'm always glad when you are. Now run along and have your bath."

He kissed her again and left the room. She smiled as she started to poke the fire, and started to think of all the young women who, under these circumstances, were supposed to bury their heads shyly on their husband's shoulders, and whisper the happy tidings to the stars.

. . . . . .

Vivian's son was born at the end of July. It was a fairly quick birth, but when the time came they found that her heart did not stand the anæsthetic well, and the heavy strain and the pain made Vivian look older. Lying back in her bed, her eyes looked darker and more shadowed than ever, with heavy rings beneath them. Her face seemed very pale these days, her rather sallow complexion taking on a white and lined appearance. Her hair also lost its lustre, and by the time she was up again there were quite a few grey hairs discernible. From the start she felt a hungry and passionate love for her baby.

"Isn't it strange," she spoke of it one day to the nurse, "I wasn't a bit excited about his coming—I had not an ounce of maternal instinct in me. At least, I don't think I had. And now here I am, can't bear him out of my sight. Give him to me, please."

For hours she would lie, completely content, with Timothy crooked asleep in her arm by her side. Sometimes she tried to dream into a future, and even then, early days as

they were, her heart would bleed and tears—such strangers to her—would well up into her eyes, as she imagined Timothy growing up and away from her, first out of her arms and scrambling to crawl over the floors—yes, that would come first. In so few months one lost one's baby. Then he would no longer be a baby but a child, and being a boy he would probably find rollicking about with a father much jollier than playing with her. Yet it was supposed to be a fact that fathers and daughters, mothers and sons were in sympathy. She hoped it would turn out so in this case. But they were old—he would so soon prefer other companions, other boys—already in her imagination she could see him springing from a chair after a meal, wiping a dirty mouth hurriedly on his sleeve in all likelihood, and tearing off to join other Timothys, Peters and Pauls.

She kissed the soft fair down on his head—so gently for fear of waking him. How awful when he left for his first school—just a day school (to break him in for a prep.), then a prep. to break him in for his public school. . . . Then Rugby or Marlborough before he went up to the Varsity. Break, break, break—no, that was a song. But life was full of breaks, for boys especially. He would soon leave her and become a man. Even so she was happy that she was a son's mother. She felt she would be able to help him and in early days play with him. Richard would have his boyhood, and help him in his young manhood, but his baby days would belong to her. And, after all, who had said: 'The hand that rocks the cradle——?' Small Timothy would stir in his sleep, and Vivian's heart would stir once more inside her. She wanted to hug him to death, to take and kiss him all over, specially the little wrinkle at the back of his neck, and his funny baby hands. Her son, her baby, her Timothy.

She was glad these days that Richard had to go to the office. She was utterly content; and after the first few days of paternal pride Vivian knew by his manner that she was assured of her son's babyhood, that Richard would wait patiently till he could run about and kick a football before he started to seduce him from her. She knew how jealous she would become—she remembered what jealousy meant, so long forgotten. Yet she loved Richard, he was her friend, her husband, and now above all, Timothy's father.

In the summer evenings, sitting in the orchard at the house they'd taken up the river, Richard would find them both on his return from the city. His wife and his son. There he was always sure of finding them, lying back under the apple trees. And Richard would watch them both, but his look soon left the boy and rested on the woman he loved. He would watch her lovingly, passionately—achingly. His—his.

And his wife watched her baby. Hers—hers.

III

Richard never knew that a change had come about in his wife. His days followed punctiliously the same well-ordered routine. Vivian seemed the same to him. She had a sense of duty, and more; Richard had given her Timothy, and he must never know that since his son's coming he took a second place.

Timothy was now two, a lovely little boy with a fair curly head, and big blue eyes. Vivian had a young nurse to help her look after him. She wanted desperately to do everything for him herself, but Richard said it was spoiling him, that it was unfair also, both to the boy and himself. Timothy must get used to other people, he told her. What if she were ill, or went away? Vivian smiled and held her peace. Go away and leave him? Never. Besides, Richard argued, he would never see her himself if she was continually tied. She had the baby all day, her evenings and nights belonged to him. Vivian submitted to him, and Richard never knew or guessed how bored his wife was at nights, and how gradually as the years went by her old fastidiousness crept back into her heart, that she longed for her own room, to be left alone.

When Timothy was six years old Vivian nearly died. What should have been her daughter was born prematurely, and Vivian lived only by a miracle. For days on end she lay delirious, fever adding to her difficulty. It was a fortnight before Richard was allowed in the room to talk to her, and

when she opened her eyes and stretched out her hand, it seemed as though some poor ghost lay there.

"Timothy?" was the first word that fell from her lips.

"He's all right, my darling. Sent you these, picked 'em from the garden. I told him I was coming to see Mummie." And Richard placed a bunch of primroses on the pillow.

Tears ran down Vivian's face. She felt so dreadfully weak and silly.

"It's all right," she whispered, and tried to smile.

"My poor little Vivian," he kissed her forehead, "this is such a damnable business—and I don't want to tire you by talking of it."

So for another five minutes Hemmingway sat in the chair beside her bed, just holding her hand and gently kissing it. He realised more than ever how nearly he had lost her, and his heart turned cold at the thought. His Vivian, his beloved wife. . . . He must be so careful of her now. God! how could he have endured life without her? He kissed her cheek, and her eyes opened again.

"Come—again—soon," she spoke so softly, "and try and bring Timothy."

"I'll ask 'em if they'll let me," he answered.

The nurse came in and told him he must go. Vivian smiled at him, then as the door closed and he and the nurse left the room, a wave of relief ran through her, and she knew she could sleep once again.

After that she grew a little stronger every day, and Richard would arrive and generally Timothy, who sat quiet and somewhat awe-inspired on a chair beside the bed, as he was not allowed on it. When he first came, he hung his head and turned pink, and hardly spoke. Vivian was unhappy and hurt. She seemed listless when they left her, till the nurse, thinking to cheer her, handed her a mirror and powder-puff. It was the first time she had used one or

taken any interest in her appearance. When she held it, shakingly, she saw herself, deathly pale, black-rimmed, haggard, and burst into tears.

"My dear, whatever is it?" and the nurse ran to her.

"Look at me. I'm frightful, ghastly. He was frightened of me, my Timothy, my baby," and she cried so much that she was told he would not be allowed to see her again if she did not stop.

A few weeks later when she was much better, they told her that she must never have another child, nor run any risk of doing so.

"Have you told my husband?" she asked.

"No, he hasn't been told."

"I will tell him. I'd rather."

"You've taken it very bravely," they said to her. Vivian tried to hide the relief she felt.

That afternoon Richard came alone. They talked of outside things for a while and then Vivian said:

"I've never spoken about it before, Richard. But were you very disappointed?"

"What? What about?"

"All this. The baby. I know you'd have enjoyed having a daughter."

"That's all right, darling," he said, "I've only loathed and detested it all for you, all your suffering, all you've been through."

"Bless you," said Vivian, and squeezed his hand.

"Besides," he tried to speak lightly, "there's lots of time yet."

There was a slight pause.

"My dear, that's what I've got to tell you. I can't ever have another baby."

She watched his face. Saw him bite his lip, and rub his head.

"Poor darling! What a shame." He tried not to show disappointment.

"It's for you I mind," Vivian said, "I don't, I didn't really want another baby, you know." She hoped she didn't sound hard or unkind. "And I've got Timothy," she added more to herself.

"Yes, we've got Timothy."

Somehow, unjustly she knew, the 'we' jarred.

"There's something else I've got to tell you," she said.

"Yes?"

There was a pause.

"They say I mustn't live with you."

"You mean—you mean——?"

"Yes."

She heard the intake of his breath, and she did not dare look at his face. She knew he was hurt, desperately. She heard him walk over to the window and back. When she looked round she saw he had his face buried in his hands, that his knuckles showed white and hard.

"I'm sorry," she whispered.

"I wouldn't have hurt you," he began.

"Well, there it is," she started to speak—a hard note crept into her voice. Men were all the same. Still a husband after all—justifiable, she supposed.

"I'm sorry, darling, to make a fool of myself. Damn selfish, after all, it's as bad for you."

Vivian said nothing.

"I must go now," he tried to speak naturally.

When her husband had gone Vivian lay back with a sigh of relief. That was over. And all that part of their life together over, too. Now she could be happy, happy with Timothy; and happy with Richard, too. She was so much better as a friend, a companion, than as a wife. The last

few years had been difficult, only she knew how the physical side of it all bored her and, yes, repelled her. At the beginning, it had not seemed to matter. She had realised so suddenly how lonely her life had been for the last few years that she was overwhelmingly grateful to Richard for taking her away from herself, and marriage and all that went with it she accepted as means to the end. But she had been married now for nearly eight years and longed sometimes to be alone once more. If Richard was her friend only, how wonderful life would be, she often thought. But then she would not have had Timothy, and he was worth all the sacrifices in the world.

She lay in bed and wondered if she could have spoken to Richard more tactfully. Was she growing selfish? Illness sometimes turned one so. But his words 'we have Timothy,' had annoyed her, and she wondered if they would still have done so had she been up and strong and well. It was shameful to grudge a father his son. But Timothy was so much more hers than Richard's. For six years, getting on for seven, he had spent practically his entire life at her side. Who played endlessly with him, took him for his walks, always read to him, talked to him? And when he fell and cut his knees, and that time the bee had stung his thumb, the only idea in his head was to rush to her side, with his big bewildered eyes. Had she spoilt him? He was all she had to live for. Once, long ago it seemed, someone had meant the whole world to her, but Clare had been taken and life indeed became drab and pointless. Timothy made up for everything, and yes, everyone. Did it matter, was it wrong to spoil a little boy of six? And she fell to ruminating on his shy behaviour whenever he came to see her in the nursing-home.

She was silly to mind his long quietnesses, his even slightly evasive kisses. All the nurses in their long flowing

veils and stiff aprons, the bare unfriendly-looking rooms, all must seem rather frightening and queer to a little boy, crowned by seeing his mother, whom he had never known to stay in bed a whole day in his life, lying propped up on pillows, looking like a ghost, and speaking in a different, a quieter voice.

Poor little Timothy ! She would take him away to the sea when she was better, and they would have long lovely days together. She supposed for a time she would have to take a nurse away, too, and be pushed about in a bath-chair. But he wouldn't mind. Oh, they would have a grand time.

Then came the Tuesday. Into the room burst Timothy with Richard at his heels.

" Can I tell her, can I tell her ? " he shouted.

" Yes, go on, old boy," Richard grinned, " only don't make too much row or you'll have all the other patients kicking up a fuss."

" What have you got to tell me, precious ? " asked Vivian, as she threw her arms round him.

Timothy shrugged away from her and danced round the room.

" You'll never guess what Daddy's given me, you'll never guess."

Vivian looked at her husband with enquiry in her eyes, but he was looking at Timothy.

" He's given me a *pony*. A real live pony," and he took hold of Richard's hands and swung himself round and round him.

" Richard, you haven't ? He can't ride. Why didn't you ask me before doing this ? " she spoke harshly.

Hemmingway looked surprised and laughed.

" Good Heavens, you're not nervous, are you ? You who've ridden all your life ? "

"No—no. But that was different, I was brought up in the country, and moors at my very door. And I think I ought to have been told, or at any rate my opinion asked."

"Daddy, can we go now? Can we?"

"But, darling, you've only just come," Vivian said, in a hurt voice.

"Oh, but I do want to ride my pony. I'm going to learn this morning, aren't I? Daddy, aren't I?" And he tugged at Richard's sleeve. Hemmingway looked at his wife beseechingly.

"Of course, go if you want to," said Vivian, taking up a newspaper.

Timothy started running towards the door.

"Hi, young man—go and kiss Mummie good-bye. You mustn't forget her now you've got this pony, you know, or I shall be sorry I've given it to you."

Forget her, forget her, forget her.

"Good-bye, Mummie darling," he bounded to the bedside and spoke hurriedly, almost automatically. Vivian put her arms round him and he brushed a kiss on her cheek and was gone.

"Come on, Daddy, come on, Daddy."

She heard them go along the passage and down the stairs. Timothy's voice rather high and piercing.

"And what shall we call him, Daddy? Do you think Peter, or perhaps Joey?" Away from her, farther and farther away.

An icy fear gripped her. She was not frightened about his riding, no child of hers would come to any harm on a horse. She had always thought of the time when Timothy would learn to ride—they were to have ridden together, first she would have walked beside him, and then later, she would have ridden, too, with him on a leading rein alongside.

And now Richard was with him. Oh, he'd be careful all right, there was no fear of that. But Richard had given something to Timothy, and she knew enough about children to know that from now on Richard would cease to be a mere word, just Daddy, would become a tin God, the giver of this—this damn pony. She felt sick—this was the first step. Who knew how far Richard had wormed himself into his son's heart, and what games they'd been up to, these long weary weeks? For the first time for many, many years, she was jealous. And she knew that she almost hated Richard. It was the beginning of the end, she told herself. Timothy's babyhood, even his childhood, was over. He would now start becoming a boy. He had been her baby, her precious baby, and now he was to be just her son. Their son.

All those beautiful days she had planned—useless. She wouldn't wrench Timothy away from what was to be his fun now, a new pony, and—Daddy. Or should she? Would she fight for him? No, no.

And suddenly Vivian felt terribly tired. She hadn't the strength to fight even had she so wished. Turning on her side she tried to sleep, but her eyes smarted with welling tears, and she knew for the first time the agony of being a son's mother.

IV

WHEN Vivian was strong again the Hemmingways let the little house in Chelsea and took a place in the country. Suffold Farm lay in a hollow of the downs, between Alfriston and the sea. Here Vivian came with Timothy for the summer months that lay in front of them, and Richard would come to them for the week-ends, staying the rest of the week at the club. Vivian's hysterical resentment against Richard calmed down once she started living away from him, away in the country that she fell in love with at once. Timothy, too, at least during the week, appeared as affectionate and as much hers as ever. Sometimes she found his extremely hilarious spirits over week-ends just a little trying, and then she told herself she must not be selfish and impatient, and that naturally Timothy loved to be with his father, who could play endless tiring games with him, and take him riding over the downs.

"He's running wild you know, dearest," Richard said one day. "He'll have to go to school when we go back."

"Yes, I suppose so." Vivian sighed; the dreaded moment had come at last.

"Does he know anything at all?"

"Of course he does. He's done lessons with Miss Hay for over a year now, and you can't tell me a few months of fresh air and doing nothing is going to harm him."

"No, dear, you're probably right. Anyway, I know it's out of the question his studying at the moment. You'd never have come away without him, and as Miss What's-

'er-name bores you to death, her being here would not have done you any good. Oh, it's all right now—but you can't expect it every year."

"I don't."

"Do you wish you lived in the country still, Vivian?" he asked.

"M'mm. Terribly sometimes."

"I'll see if we can't manage it somehow, darling. After all things are going pretty well—there's no reason why you shouldn't."

"Oh, Richard—do you really think we might? Of course, I adore Chelsea, but oh! the peace and quiet of it here. . . ."

"Even in winter? Think of the short days, filthy muddy lanes, no theatres—I wonder. . . ."

"Lord! Richard," she started, almost impatiently, "you'd think I adored London instead of only putting up with it. Didn't I spend half of my life in the country? What are theatres and cinemas to me? I ache for a muddy lane sometimes when I'm pottering along the King's Road and it's pouring with rain. Who'd walk in London for the love of it? Only on a lovely spring day. Whereas, whereas, in the country I'm perfectly happy in any sort of weather—rain and cold hold no terror for me then, believe me. In gum-boots and a trench coat, not bothering a tinker's curse what one looks like."

"Well. If that's how you feel about it. Why haven't you told me all these years?"

"Oh, I don't know."

"And there'd be Timothy. You realise you wouldn't have him?"

"How d'you mean?"

"Well, it wouldn't be fair on the boy. What chance of an education would he have? You must remember,

sweetheart, that boys are very different from girls. They have to go to school."

"Yes. I'd forgotten."

"I expect there are crowds of decent prep. schools—ones that cater for small kids of Tim's age."

"Oh, don't call him Tim," Vivian snapped, "you know how I loathe it."

"Sorry." There was a long silence.

"I suppose," began Vivian, "if we lived in Town he would go to a day school?"

Richard looked up.

"I said, that if we were in London Timothy could go to a day school?"

"Yes—yes."

"For quite a long time?"

"For years I should think," said Richard shortly, "send him to Westminster and have done with it."

"You needn't be horrid, Richard. You don't know what life would be to me without him."

He laughed—rather bitterly.

"I've a pretty good idea. And I know if I went to Canada—and I shall have to go again next year—you wouldn't give a damn."

"That's not true," began Vivian, but with so little conviction in her voice that even Richard had to smile.

"Perhaps you'll come with me this time?" he suggested politely.

"Oh, sufficient unto the day, Richard," said Vivian wearily.

When Richard went back to London Vivian thought she would try and give Timothy some lessons.

"Oh, Mummie, *must* I?" he began.

"Well, darling, Daddy seems to think you ought to." This made her thoughtful.

"But need he know?"

"You'll have to go to school in the winter, and it'd be awful if all the other boys know much more than you. Wouldn't it?"

"Would they be older'n me?"

"Some of them, I expect."

"Then I 'spect it wouldn' matter dredfully."

Vivian hesitated.

"Please can't I go and ride now, Mummie?" and off he ran.

. . . . . .

"Mummie," he spoke to her one day, "I do wish I had someone to play with."

"Darling—of course. What shall we play?"

"Oh, I don't mean you. I mean someone littler. Another boy, or even a girl."

"You'd have plenty of boys to play with if you went to school, precious."

Timothy thought for a bit.

"Perhaps I'd better go then after all."

She sighed.

"Couldn't I have a brother, don't you think? I would love a brother *so* much. Lots of little boys have one."

"Well, darling, if I got you one he'd only be a baby, and that'd bore you frightfully. Wouldn't it?"

"Would it? I'd rather have a baby than none at all."

This was awful. And later:

"Mummie, how *are* children borned?"

Vivian hadn't been expecting this. She spoke stumblingly the first ideas that came into her head.

"Well—let me see. Mummie gets seeds, and grows them, and then when it's time and they're grown enough, they become tiny babies."

"In a garden? Seeds like my 'stershams?" he was very excited.

"Yes, that's the sort of thing," said Vivian vaguely. A week later Timothy burst into her room, out of breath and rather flushed.

"Mummie, he hadn't got any."

"Who hadn't got what? What are you talking about?"

"We've been to Lewes, like you said. An' I went to the flower seed shop an' asked, but he hadn't got any."

"Any what, though?" Vivian was at a loss.

"Seeds. Seeds for babies—brothers and sisters—you know, like you said."

"Oh, darling!" Never in her life had Vivian wanted to laugh so much. "Did you go and ask Mr. James for them?"

"Yes, and he was so surprised."

"Well, you see, Timothy, they aren't quite those sort of seeds," Vivian tried to keep her face from smiling too much. He wasn't very fond of being laughed at.

"Daddy gave me some ages ago, and I've lost them. And they aren't grown in gardens exactly, but all warmly under Mummie's heart. See?"

"I see," said Timothy, and plainly didn't.

"Daddy, will you give Mummie some more seeds?" was the somewhat startling remark hurled at Richard during the week-end, "I do want a brother so."

"What on earth——?" began Richard.

"Timothy, go and fetch my book, there's a lamb," Vivian said quickly, and while he was gone told Richard Timothy's hopeless new fad.

"Good Lord, what else will you put into his head next? Seeds,—my God!"

"It's high time you went to school, old boy," he started when Timothy came into the room.

Vivian winced. She hated it when Richard spoke to her son in a 'grown-up' fashion. Trying to make him more 'manly' as he expressed it.

"Time you had boys of your own age to play with,—as you won't get a brother." Seeing how the boy's face dropped, he changed the subject and said:

"What will you be, Tim, when you're a man? Ever thought?"

Richard proudly waited for the proverbial engine-driver answer.

"I'm going to be a Mummie, and born children."

"God in Heaven!" he shouted. "You're going to school next term, I give you my word for that."

Vivian remained silent. She knew she had failed in Richard's eyes as the right sort of woman to bring Timothy up. And she didn't care. 'Stuffing nonsense into his head.' Oh, Timothy, Timothy. . . .

. . . . . .

During the year that followed Vivian realised her bad dreams, the fears she had known after Timothy was born were coming true. First his babyhood left her. Gradually he had ceased to be her own child. He was fast becoming a boy. It was turning out as she knew it would. She did not know how long she might live, maybe seventy or even eighty. She did not know how long Timothy would live,—for a long time, she supposed, unless another war carried him off. She shuddered at the mere thought. But the point to her was that for their lifetime he belonged to her for about seven years. Such a tiny space. He no longer bounded into the room with the same love and baby kisses. (Should she even expect him to?) He brought other boys to tea with him, and she remembered the pang,

—absurd of course, most mothers would be amused,—when a boy of nine alluded to her Timothy as Hemmingway.

They were very independent, these small men that she was becoming used to. She found out the right things to do and not to do by degrees. Never to kiss Timothy, for instance, in front of one of his companions. She did so once and realised by his blush and abrupt manner, and the push he almost gave her, that it was not the thing to do. He seemed very proud of Richard these days, hung on every word he said, and lived for Sunday afternoons when the two of them used to go off to the Zoo together. Richard was proud, too, proud of his fast-growing manliness.

"I knew it was all he needed. School, and decent kids of his own age to muck about with. An only child's life is difficult."

"I ought to know," Vivian said quietly.

"M'mm. But you were a girl, very different."

Sometimes Vivian would lie awake at nights and think about Richard. Which of them had changed most, and whether it was the fault of either. It wasn't only since she had ceased living with him as his wife, though that had altered him, shut him up more, so to speak. No, it had been going on far longer. Ever since Timothy was about two, she thought. It was her fault, she supposed. All her life men and the contact of men had bored her, been alien to her.

When she was young, it seemed now so long ago she could scarcely remember, Richard had attracted her. Then had come those years of Clare, filled in turn with happiness and sorrow, followed by the dreadful empty years without her. All her life something, something had been lacking. So she had married Richard, selfishly because he seemed such a safe refuge and she was fond of him. And then Timothy,—yes, he made up for everything.

No feeling lacking about him, until now, and now here he was, fast leaving her and growing up. Growing away. She saw long years ahead of her, alone. Or with Richard, which was the same as being alone. She felt nowadays for him the same rather kindly feeling one feels for a favourite piece of furniture. And he? She knew he loved her, but he no longer pretended to understand her. He was hurt as the months had turned into years, and she still refused to sleep with him any more. So he turned his love to Timothy in a thoroughly British slap-on-the-back fashion. Proud of his young son, what! Neither of them was probably very happy, but of the two Vivian suffered most. In this world there are always some people who court unhappiness, depression, morbidity, and Vivian was one of these.

And then came Oliver Parsons.

V

When Timothy was nine his appendix had to be removed. He was brought home in the middle of a beautiful early spring afternoon when Vivian imagined him playing football. In the midst of running he had fallen writhing to the ground. No one had kicked him, it was perfectly obvious that no injury had been caused by the game. When he arrived back, accompanied by one of the masters, he looked pale and as though he were suffering or had been suffering. Vivian was terrified and put him to bed at once. He was violently sick, and it didn't take the doctor three minutes to pronounce his verdict of acute appendicitis, and that an immediate operation was necessary. Timothy was taken off to a nursing home within the hour and a perfectly successful operation was performed.

It so happened that the day of Timothy's attack had been two days before the end of the term. The school were only given three weeks' holiday, and Vivian was determined that he should not go back. Richard had to go to Canada in the beginning of May, and at first there was a suggestion that Vivian and Timothy should go, too. But Timothy seemed slow at picking up strength and the doctors were against it.

"You can't have him hanging about doing nothing," Hemmingway argued. "It's a very tricky age for a boy. His future, exams for his prep. school, everything depends on him now—he really mustn't stay idle for months on end."

"Damn it, it's not my fault," Vivian said, "anyone would think I wanted him to be ill."

"You adore having him home all day, fussing and coddling him."

"How unkind you are, Richard," said Vivian. And then, later:

"Have you any suggestions to make, anyway?"

"The boy must have a tutor." Vivian's heart sank.

"A tutor?"

"Well, why not?"

"Oh, I don't know. I've been talking to Dr. Grey and he says a summer in the country or by the sea is the thing for Timothy."

"Yes—well, why not?"

"We shall never find a tutor in some out-of-the-way spot."

"My darling girl, all you've got to do is to engage some nice efficient bloke and cart him along, too."

"Have some complete stranger foisted on to us for months on end? My God. . . ."

"Oh, don't be unreasonable, Vivian. Timothy's your son. I imagine you don't want him to suffer. His education and all that. Besides, he's bored stiff with nothing but a lot of women round him morning, noon and night."

"Bored with me?"

"Yes, bored with you, my dear. You forget he's no longer a baby."

Wasn't she reminded of the fact every day, she thought, bitterly.

"He's been used to kids of his own age for nearly two years now, and as that's out of the question, he must have a man. It's not as if I'm going to be home even."

"Oh, all right, all right," Vivian said wearily, "but you'll have to engage him."

A week later Richard said in the middle of dinner:

"Oh, by the way, I saw quite a good chap to-day for Timothy. I think I may as well settle for him to come."

"What's he like?" Vivian asked in rather a bored voice.

"Youngish—an Oxford man—was going into the Church, and then found he hadn't the vocation, or whatever you call it, and chucked it. I told him all the facts and he seemed quite keen. He's been tutoring a couple of boys these holidays."

"What's his name?"

"Parsons. Oliver Parsons. I think you'll like him. Quite a quiet sort of fellow, looks as if he ought to write or something. And he'll be able to coach Tim very ably I'm sure, and later on when he's quite fit again he can play games with him. I asked him to come to tea with him to-morrow. I thought it wouldn't be a bad idea."

"Oh—what a nuisance. I've got to go and see this house on the river to-morrow. Still, I daresay I can be back in time. You might go and say good-night to Timothy, Richard, and tell him about Mr. Parsons."

The next day Vivian motored herself down to Ffoulds Manor. It was about thirty miles from London, on the river; isolated, peaceful and very old. Originally an Elizabethan farm-house, it had been converted, probably over two hundred years before. The rooms were panelled, and the ceilings were carved and the floors uneven. A stone hall hung with tapestries, and a wide carved oak staircase decided Vivian. She must take the place. The gardens were laid out in old-fashioned style, with a rose garden, lavender walks complete with sundial in the centre, and a large walled-in kitchen garden. There was a lily pond and a Shakespeare border, even a miniature maze: and a tennis-court and lawns bordered by lilacs

and syringas. Close by was the slow, quiet, rambling river. Cut off from all the world it seemed, but for kingfishers and swallows, banks of overgrown nettles and campions, bluebells and foxgloves, and miles for future explorations. She noticed a dilapidated punt and a canoe, the latter used by the 'young gentlemen,' whoever they were, to 'shoot the rapids.' She was overjoyed at the thought of spending months here with Timothy. And—she remembered grudgingly, Mr. Parsons.

Vivian got home to Chelsea at about six o'clock. She saw a strange hat and coat in the hall and guessed that this Mr. Parsons must still be here.

At that moment Timothy appeared.

"Oh, darling, I've seen the most divine house in the world," and she proceeded to tell him all about it.

"It sounds lovely, Mummie. When shall we go?"

"As soon as Daddy's sailed, in about a week."

"What fun we'll have." Timothy sounded pleased; she was glad.

"Oh, I forgot. What's your tutor person like? Dull?"

Poor Timothy, it did seem a shame. However, with Richard out of the way she'd see he didn't overwork.

"Mr. Parsons? He's awfully jolly. I like him awfully," and his eyes started popping with his usual youthful enthusiasm.

"He's awfully bucked there's a river, he told me he loves it, and he'll teach me to punt."

"You can't. It would be bad for your stitches."

"Oh. Well, anyway, he can, and I'll go with him."

Somehow the glory of her day had departed. Vivian felt a twinge of resentment already for this tutor, this Mr. Parsons.

Then there were steps in the hall, voices, and a sound of the front door opening. She ran out.

"Oh, here you are, Vivian. Sorry, didn't know you'd got back. This is my wife, Parsons. He can't stop as he has a train to catch."

Vivian found herself face to face with Oliver Parsons for the first time. He looked about twenty-seven, was a little taller than herself, and had a slim, youthful figure. He was carrying his hat and she noticed his hair was dark, and seemed to fall untidily about his forehead. His face was pale; he had the expression of a dreamer. A dreamer who has woken to a world of realities.

"How d'you do?" she said, and gave him her hand.

"I'm so sorry I have to dash off like this," he said, stammering slightly. "I have to go into the country."

"That's all right. I'll write to you and tell you plans."

"Will you? Do. That would be so kind." He flashed her a smile and was gone.

VI

Richard Hemmingway sailed for Canada the last week in May, and Vivian, Timothy and Oliver Parsons moved to Ffoulds two days later. By the middle of June Vivian felt she had lived there all her life. She would not let herself think of the day when she would have to give it all up, leave it, perhaps for ever.

"D'you know the feeling?" she laughed at Oliver Parsons, "all the time I want to go round realising every minute. One's time goes so terribly quickly. It's always 'was.' I feel I want to go round touching everything about the place, to use my eyes and see it, pretend to see it for the first time always."

She hesitated.

"You must think me mad," she said.

Oliver Parsons looked at her, laughed, too.

"Good Lord, no! Places have nearly always meant more to me than people. In some places I could be alone, for the rest of my life, or even with people I didn't care for and it wouldn't matter. Yet if I were somewhere that depressed me, somewhere ugly, even with someone I loved —well, everything would go. Funny, isn't it?"

She nodded.

"I think Capri got me more than anywhere I know. Have you ever been there?" he asked.

"Yes," Vivian answered slowly, "I was there a long time ago."

Something in her voice made Oliver Parsons look at her.

He got up from the chair he was sitting on and moved away.

"Timothy wants to go on the river," he called back at her.

"Oh, yes, of course, I remember," she answered. "Well, be careful, and don't let him persuade you to let him try and punt or anything."

She took up some knitting—socks for Timothy—and found herself thinking of Oliver Parsons.

He was easy, and yet aloof in some ways. Timothy liked him, and he was certainly very efficient and conscientious about his job. But she knew very little about him. In the evenings when they were alone they usually discussed books and music. Sometimes he played the piano to her—he played beautifully. He seemed to be two different people, in the daytime, and when Timothy was about, he was just a charming and easy young man, the perfect young tutor. When he was freed from his duties he seemed to Vivian to take on another form. His whole personality changed. It was as though a curtain dropped and revealed him faun-like, mystic, and apart.

Often in the cool of the evening, after a game of tennis with Vivian, he wandered down to the river. Once she and Timothy came upon him, poised for a dive on the fallen trunk of a willow. His body gleamed white against the dark background of the high bank. Suddenly there was a flutter and a kingfisher darted out from the rushes. A second later Oliver Parsons swallow-dived in after him. Presently Timothy whistled. The young man looked surprised when he saw he was being watched.

"Hullo," he shouted at them, and waved from the water. "This is grand, come on in."

"I can't," Timothy yelled back.

"Of course, I forgot." He swam across the river to where they were standing.

"Why don't you?" he asked Vivian.

"Not now," she said, "but I will another day. I like it in the heat of the day. I think it's a bit chilly now."

She wandered back into the house, her thoughts returning often—too often—to the strange Pan-like creature.

"Let's sit in the garden to-night," Oliver Parsons said. He was eating cherries and patterning the dessert plate with their stones.

"It would be rather lovely, wouldn't it?" Vivian answered, "it's such a perfect evening," and she called for the coffee to be brought out to them. She walked across the lawn and presently the tutor came, too.

"D'you mind my pipe?" he asked.

"Course not," she smiled.

They sat for a time in silence. Silent but for the birds going to their rest, the crickets in the meadow behind them, and the bull-frogs in the lily pond near by.

"Tell me about yourself, Oliver." His Christian name slipped out unnoticed by either of them.

"What d'you want to know?" he asked.

"Tell me where you live, about your people, your school days, everything. I've known you a month and yet I know nothing more of you than on the first evening when we sat and talked about Russian books and music."

"Oh, I don't know."

"D'you live at home? With your father and mother, I mean?"

He shook his head.

"No, they're dead. My mother was Irish, and very beautiful. Wild and beautiful. She was my father's model."

"He was an artist—your father?"

"Yes. Rather good—but he was lazy and he drank too much. They thought quite a lot of him over in Paris once upon a time."

"Go on."

"My mother was killed in a railway accident when I was about fourteen. My father, he never got over it."

"What did you do?"

"Oh, I was still at Eton."

"He was quite well off, then?"

"I was in college. But he was quite well off. My grandfather left him a good bit of money—otherwise he wouldn't have had any. He made very little painting."

"Why did you go to Eton?"

"Father was there. My family have been Etonians for generations, and luckily I got a scholarship. Best years of my life, I guess."

He paused.

"I was a wet bob. As a matter of fact rowing did me in. I strained my heart badly at Oxford."

"Did you actually row for Oxford?"

"I should have. My second year. Then I was ill, got pneumonia, and like a fool I started in training too early and my heart couldn't stand it. So that was that."

"What bad luck."

"M'mm. I was rather cut up about it at the time."

"My husband told me you were going into the Church."

"Yes. That's true."

"Why didn't you?"

He paused awhile. She noticed he seemed reluctant to answer.

"Don't tell me if you can't. I mean, if you'd rather not."

. . . . . .

There followed weeks of perfect summer. Vivian loved the heat, and because it tired Timothy they did very little, spending long afternoons basking in the punt underneath

shaded willow-banks. Once they came across a deserted garden, weeds full-grown to the height of tall men. The place seemed a mass of foxgloves, wild anchusa, sweet briony and dog roses. The paths were covered with moss and lichen, there were crumbling statuettes of stone cupids, and a walled-in fountain no longer working. Butterflies played from flower to flower, there was a dull hum of bees working somewhere—and far away a cuckoo called.

"Oh," breathed Vivian, "what an exquisite place."

"How lovely it would look in moonlight," said Oliver.

"Oh, do let's come in the moonlight," cried Timothy.

Vivian smiled and shook her head.

"I think it's a fairy garden, Timothy; we should probably never find it again."

He looked nonplussed and rather shame-faced.

"Surely, Mummy, you don't think I still believe in fairies?"

"Yes, don't you? I do."

That night there was a violent thunderstorm. All the night Vivian was restless, and her sleep was full of strange dreams. Sometimes alone, sometimes with Oliver—at one moment they were wandering through a forest, which she knew for the forest patterned on the large tapestries on the stairs. And always through the dreams there was music, a haunting Pan-like music.

What was the tune? She knew it, she knew it. . . . Then crash! came the deafening rap of thunder. With an effort she roused herself—and woke up. The blankets were over her face, her eiderdown anyhow, engulfing her. She sat up in bed, and met the blinding flash of lightning, followed in the distance by more peals of thunder. Then—what was that?

A sound of music, someone playing on the piano. She looked at her watch—three o'clock. Was the place

haunted? Surely no one could be playing at such an hour. But softly yet unmistakably came the notes of music. It was 'L'Apres midi d'un Faune,' and she knew at once it was the tune Oliver had played on his pipes in her dream. She crept out of bed, tip-toed across the room, gently opened the door and very slowly wandered along the passage downstairs. She opened the door of the music-room, and there she saw Oliver, clad in his pyjamas. She saw at once that he was asleep—and she wondered if she dared wake him. Sometimes it was a dangerous thing to do. Better to leave him. She climbed the stairs once more and got into her bed. She listened. Downstairs Oliver continued to play.

VII

"I WONDER what you'll do when you have to leave Timothy?"

Vivian and Oliver were sitting beneath the cedar tree, exhausted from a hot game of tennis.

"Oh, I shall go North," he replied.

"Scotland, d'you mean?"

He nodded.

"What'll you do there?"

"I have a cottage up there."

"Where is it?" she asked.

"Up on the West Coast. It's on a tiny island, miles from anywhere. It's only got two rooms."

"What on earth made you get it?"

"I adore Scotland——"

"So do I."

"I was walking there, some years ago now, with a friend. We both thought what a grand place this particular spot was, and we got hold of a crofter's cottage for a song. Eillean och Brioechan is the name of the island. It's at the foot of hills and mountains—the most glorious scenery. The Atlantic at our door. Mull's across the water from us."

"It sounds too perfect."

"You might come and see it. I'd—like you to."

"In one of the two rooms?" she smiled.

"There's an inn. Of course, it's all very primitive, perhaps you wouldn't care for it."

"I think I should. When I was a girl I used to go to Skye. I thought it the most wonderful place in the world." She paused; what an eternity it seemed since then.

"And you and a friend go there, do you?"

"Not any longer."

"Oh!"

"No—he became a monk."

"Oh!"

"He was—is—an amazing fellow."

"What's his name?" she said.

"Stuart. Basil Stuart. We met up at Oxford. He was a year ahead of me. He was frightfully vehement, and terribly earnest. An enormous chap to look at—you'd imagine him in a Rugger scrum, or wrestling broncho."

"But he's a monk."

"Yes." His voice sounded hard.

"Was that why you thought of going into the Church?"

He was silent for a minute or two.

"I wonder if you know what it's like to be so entirely alone, that if you dropped down dead in the street not a soul would give a damn?"

"Yes, Oliver. I do know."

"After my people died I literally hadn't a soul in the world. I wanted to go up to Oxford, and there I met Basil."

"What was he like? Tell me about him."

"At first I couldn't make him out at all. In some ways he might have been thirty instead of twenty. He looked much older. He very soon had tremendous influence over me, made me keen on things that I never knew about or had bothered about. Music, for instance. I'd always been keen on it in a rather shame-faced sort of way, and I'd learnt the piano when I was a kid. But good music, I didn't know anything about it. Till I met Basil I thought Gilbert and Sullivan were the peak. The word Classic

would have made me run a mile. He played the organ superbly. I used to listen to him for hours—Bach, Handel.

"In the summer vac. we happened to be in London and he made me go to the proms at Queen's Hall. That really started it all. We went to Monte Carlo at the Christmas vac., and I went to the Russian ballet. Sometimes he used to make me go to the opera. Oddly enough I hated it. Large men and larger women spoilt the beauty of it all to me."

There was a pause.

"Go on, tell me more about him."

"I took my degree and came down. Basil became a don. I couldn't make up my mind what to do—we thought we'd go round the world."

"And did you?"

"Yes. Slowly, cheaply on the whole, because he hadn't a very great deal of money and he wouldn't take any of mine. Sometimes we went on tramp steamers—we did from Rangoon to China. Sometimes we did ourselves very well—we did in Egypt, and in India."

"When did all the religion business start?" asked Vivian.

"Later. When we were tramping one autumn in Scotland. The time we found the island, as a matter of fact."

"Your friend—Basil—was he the originator? I suppose so."

"Y-yes. He had a way of talking to one, convincing one completely. And, anyway, whatever he'd have said or asked me to do, I'd have done it, I think. If he'd told me to wander round the world as a barefooted pilgrim, I'd have shrugged my shoulders and given in. But I don't suppose you'd understand."

"I do."

Something in her voice, and in her face, made Oliver look at her. He cleared his throat and went on speaking.

"Basil was a Quaker, oddly enough. His people had been for generations. Then when he went up to Oxford he became tremendously interested in every sort of religion —including many un-Christian sorts. He read Islam for nearly a year. Studied Buddhism for a time, and Confucius. Then came to the conclusion that Christianity was best, and of all Christian sects, Roman Catholicism came out first."

"Strange for a Quaker."

"Ah, but he was a strange Quaker, and a strange character altogether. Up in Scotland—I remember the day so well—we had walked and climbed all day, and had reached the top of a pretty high hill, and had flung ourselves down by a tarn to rest. There were acres of bog-cotton everywhere, and there was a most miraculous sunset. You could see behind for miles, right away across Argyll and the mountains, into Inverness. The sea; the Atlantic had the misty blue colour you only get from a real scorching sunset. You know the kind——?"

She nodded.

"Basil suddenly said he must be a priest. I laughed—I thought it was one of his mad ideas. He turned on me, livid. Said he felt called upon. That it was the only thing in life for him. Well, he talked and talked. For days. And of course he got me round. He said he should be received into the Church and following that he would enter a college, a Jesuit college, for further instruction."

"And then?"

"Oh, I was very weak. I knew I'd be no earthly use by myself and I said I'd go along, too. Before we left Eillean och Brioechan we had bought the cottage, as we both worshipped the place, and meant to go there whenever possible. We spent the next few months in London.

"The Easter following was early. We went to Rome.

Basil was determined to go. I can't tell you what it was like."

"I know," said Vivian, "I've been. It's incredible, isn't it?"

"But you haven't been with a fanatic, someone whose whole bearing became completely changed, and you haven't had to realise that a mere week has the power to alter your very existence, perhaps for ever. Have you?"

Vivian shook her head.

"That's what did happen. Basil became a veritable maniac, a fanatic. From being the very steady, admittedly powerful creature I knew, he went about like a drunken man——"

"Perhaps he was," said Vivian.

"No, he never touched a thing. But in Rome it was as though he was drunken with the pomp and surroundings of the Vatican and all its meanings. I used to wander about the city by myself. I longed to explore the ancient parts. He grumbled and said it was dead glory, he had no use for it. And I'd find him rushing off to the Vatican or St. Peter's. I think he really became mad, and saw in himself a future Pope. And I—I didn't know what to do. I couldn't leave him to his fate, you see, I loved him. And I knew then that priesthood would damn me and I should damn priesthood. I became crazy in my mind, not knowing what to do. He realised a lot when we left Italy, and calmed down. But he stopped talking to me and telling me things.

"When we arrived in England he fabricated relations I'd never known to exist." Oliver laughed rather bitterly.

"What did you do?" Vivian spoke.

"I stayed on in the rooms we'd always used. He hardly came at all. I started to look for a job; I saw that things were going to be different. I got some goodish coaching work and went on, hoping for the best. Then one day I

had a note to say that he was coming up to London to collect some things, and he hoped I'd be there. We dined in Soho—he told me he was going to Spain next day. It was a ghastly meal—I was wretched, irritable, at not going with him. I told him if he'd give me another fortnight I could go too. Or even join him. He said he didn't want me. Complete quiet and isolation were essential. All that part of life, his friendship with me, was over. I couldn't believe it was true.

"For the last half-hour I shouldn't think we said more than three words between us. Of course, I saw him off next day. He was very pleasant but distrait. I didn't hear a thing from him for five months, then he wrote and said he was entering a monastery somewhere near Toledo. He had done four months' novitiate and realised it was the only life for him. It was the strictest order possible, they weren't allowed to speak."

Oliver was silent. Presently:

"How long ago was that?" Vivian said.

"Eighteen months since I got that letter."

He lit his pipe and handed her a cigarette. Both smoked in silence.

"Thank you for telling me," she said.

He started and stammered.

"I—I really don't know why I did. I've never told a soul before."

"And haven't you any friends now?"

"Friends?—No. Oh, of course I know a lot of decent fellows, people I knew up at Oxford."

"Have you no girl friends, women friends?"

He shook his head.

"Girls? No. I've never been in love in my life. It must be pretty grand—if you're not let down in the middle."

"You're rather cynical and bitter, aren't you?" she said.

"D'you see any reason why I shouldn't be?"

"N-no. Except I think it's rather a weak trait. And rather obvious which you aren't."

He laughed.

"I am weak."

"I think that's rather an awful thing to say at your age."

"It's easy for you to talk. Look at all you've got. . . ."

"What fools, what utter fools we are to imagine we understand other people. Never envy, never think to yourself, 'There goes someone I'd like to be. How lucky he—or she—is.' What on earth do we know of other people? Who are we to express opinions?"

"But aren't you happy? You should be, you have everything you want."

"Have I? Should I be? No, I'm not really happy. I'm sufficiently content down here at Ffoulds, I may say I'm nearly happy. But who are you to state whether I should be happy? How on earth could you possibly know?"

"I'm sorry," Oliver stammered.

"It's the way of youth to imagine no one but themselves suffer. Oh, I know you're twenty-seven—or is it thirty?—but you and your generation think strangely and often unintelligently about your elders. 'So-and-so's forty. Well, whatever unhappiness they had in their youth they've forgotten now.' Forgotten—heavens! And the youthful worries and tragedies of myself, for instance, probably strike you as indecent. Certainly they should be well relegated to the past. Am I right?"

Oliver was silent.

"I must have seemed an appalling egotist to you," he began presently.

"No, you didn't. I had to drag most of your story from you, really. I've known you for quite a long time and you've never told me anything about yourself before.

No, my dear, I only meant that your generation—perhaps I was wrong about you personally—do imagine you've a monopoly where suffering is concerned."

They were roused suddenly by the sound of the gong.

"Good heavens!" said Vivian, springing to her feet. "Dinner time! I'd no idea it was so late. Come on."

Both of them were rather more silent than usual that evening during dinner. Later they went into the drawing-room.

"Play to me, Oliver," Vivian asked.

He crossed to the piano and sat down, started haphazardly Scheherazade, and strayed into a Chopin nocturne. Presently he turned to look at Vivian, lying on the high divan near the window. He couldn't see very much of her, the dusk was falling fast. Nearly forty was she? He supposed that was not surprising. Anyway, women's ages were nothing to him. Mrs. Hemmingway. Timothy Hemmingway's mother, his employer. A nice woman, a gentle woman, an intelligent woman. And what else? What lay behind those remarks of hers before dinner? He suddenly felt he wanted to know. In fact he must know. He rose from the piano and crossed over to where she lay.

"Oh, why have you stopped playing? I was enjoying it so much," she said.

"It was getting so dark. I couldn't see."

He looked at her. Perhaps for the first time. Yes—she was older than he. She looked tired. Tired of living. Her eyes, beautiful eyes, looked sad, lined and crows-footed beneath. Her face was pale, with the pallor of a woman who no longer cares very much. Funny that he'd never noticed her looks before. If he'd been asked if her eyes were blue or brown, her hair dark or fair, he'd not have known. It would not have interested him.

"Why are you unhappy?" He sat beside her in the darkening room. He knew it was an impertinent question:

he wondered if she would snub him. He hoped so much she would not.

"Oh, I'm not really."

"Why did you speak as if you were then? Before dinner, I mean."

"The things you were telling me reminded me of things that had happened to me—long ago."

"Oh!"

"You see, Oliver, I've never quite succeeded in getting to the apex of happiness. I've been awfully near it, and looking back and looking forward I can only see a commonplace failure."

"Aren't most of us the same?"

"Oh, no. Look at heaps of people, they've had complete happiness some time in their lives."

"I don't think I have."

"You've all your life in front of you."

"Don't talk as if you haven't."

She smiled.

"My dear," she said, "how could I? I always remember a line of Browning's, I can't quite remember what it's from. 'Pippa Passes,' I believe. 'The little more how much it is, the little less, what worlds away.'"

"Well?"

"My life's been like that, the little less—always, Oliver. And I've tried to alter it, two or three times I've thought I was coming nearer to the little more. It's never been for long, and the more becomes less once again."

"How? Tell me?" Oliver urged.

"Why should I bore you with stories about myself——"

"Didn't I tell you everything this afternoon? You couldn't bore me. Besides, I might be able to help in some sort of a way."

"When I was young I was left alone in the world with

quite a lot of money. I lived in the country as a child, and in spite of schools my life was very ignorant. When I first learnt the truth about things, the 'facts of life,' I was terrified, humiliated and disgusted. The only friend I had in those days was no help to me whatever. When my father died and left me well off, I travelled quite a bit and enjoyed it, but there was no one in it. No one who meant anything to me; and I was very lonely, I think. Then I met someone who lit up the whole world for me. That lasted on and off for several years. It was the most wonderful thing in my life."

"A man, I suppose," Oliver said.

"No, a woman. She was killed in an aeroplane smash. I was quite young, well under thirty, and I told myself life was over for me. Then Richard, my husband, appeared out of the blue. I'd known him some years before and he was terribly kind to me. As a matter of fact I'd nearly married him. Well, when he came to England again things seemed to change. I'd been so frightfully lonely since Clare's death. Richard was charming and begged me to marry him. I was very fond of him, his friendship meant a lot to me and I began to think I'd been wrong all my life, missing things I ought not to have missed. I found myself rather clinging to the thought of him and all he stood for. The little more—you see?"

"Go on," Oliver nodded.

"We were married and for a time I was awfully happy. In a undemonstrative sort of way. Then Timothy was born, and everything else seemed as nothing. Before he was born I wasn't at all excited, I know I had no maternal instinct, as it's called, at all. But I accepted the whole thing as something I was doing for Richard. Once he was born though I was changed. I felt he was mine, all mine. I grew terribly jealous about him, and I resented the

knowledge that one day Richard would want and demand as great a share of him as myself. And all the time I told myself that it wouldn't happen. While he was a baby and during the time he was little he never cared for anyone but me. I believe Richard made him feel nervous, he was always so—so hearty with him. Then when he was about six I was very ill and had to go to a nursing home for weeks.

"During that time they discovered each other, Richard gave him a pony and from then on he became Timothy's god. Then he had to go to school and,—well I expect you know what boys are like. Soon their mothers are nothing but a name, someone to go to if they fall and hurt themselves, nothing more—and I suppose one should be grateful for that."

Vivian stopped.

"But I know he's terribly fond of you. He's always talking about you. Never wants to go anywhere unless you come along, too."

"Does he? Bless him. But, Oliver, I know. It's being here that brings us closer. Once back at school, I shall hardly exist for him; he's fond of me, of course,—oh! I know I'm wrong, I want the impossible. But he's all I have, and he's one more 'little more' that I was wrong about. I know how much it is—and it gets taken away from me. Both the people I've loved. . . ."

"You have your husband," said Oliver, quietly.

"My husband . . . yes."

"Is that all he means?"

"I'm afraid so, Oliver," she spoke slowly.

"Nobody else at all?"

She turned and looked at him. It was quite dark now and the candles were still unlit. Only the light of a new moon, shining through mullioned window-panes, lit their

faces. Vivian looked at Oliver—and remembered the strange dream she had had.

"There's no one else. I don't want there to be." Pain rang in her voice.

"But why, why?" he asked.

"I'm tired, Oliver." She turned towards him, and he noticed unshed tears in her eyes. "My life's not been an easy one. No—perhaps I'm wrong. Perhaps it's been too easy. If I'd had to work maybe everything would have been different. Anyway, it's too late to change. I've been hurt by people all my life, I don't think I could bear it again."

"Couldn't you?"

He looked at her and their eyes met. . . . With an effort she brought her own eyes away.

"I'm going upstairs. I'm going to bed," she murmured incoherently.

She wandered to the fireplace and stood as though warming her hands behind her, forgetting there was no fire.

Oliver walked to the piano and started to play.

"What's that?" she asked.

"Nothing. Go to bed, you're tired."

But somehow Vivian felt she could not stir. Presently he stopped playing and listened. He felt her presence still in the room, for it was so dark he could not see her in the further corner.

"Are you still there?" he asked.

"Yes."

"Go to bed. I thought I told you to go ages ago." He spoke roughly, unlike himself.

"I will. I'll go now. Are you coming, too?" She still seemed to hesitate.

"No. Good night." As she turned to the door she heard a sound. Oliver had opened one of the french windows and was letting himself out into the garden.

VIII

The days that followed brought a subtle change in the attitudes of Vivian and Oliver to each other. Each of them tried to behave in the usual manner, and each of them knew it was impossible. Something had happened to change the order of things. A conversation? The exchanged confidences of past youth and past desires? Both of them felt it was something more. And yet those very conversations seemed to have broken down a barrier. No longer did Oliver feel himself merely the employee of a certain small boy's mother. No longer did Vivian say to herself that Oliver was Timothy's tutor. He was Oliver. Meal times were the most difficult. In the mornings each went their own way. He was with Timothy doing his job, she in the house or in the gardens, busy always. Then came lunch, and that strained relationship when each tried to cover up the interest they had in one another, and talked for Timothy's sake. The afternoons again were less difficult, for excursions up the river, or siestas in the sun were comparatively easy to cope with. But then came dinner, and the eyes of servants upon them. They talked of books and art and politics, and knew they no longer cared a fig for any of them. And silences would come and seem oppressive, and Vivian wondered if she was really dull and whether she was old and if Oliver realised the disparity in their ages. And Oliver sat and smoked and thought how incredible life was. That for twenty-seven years no woman but his mother had meant

anything to him at all, that they were as myths to him, and that now he had fallen in love with a married woman ten years older than himself.

Sometimes Vivian wondered what would happen when Richard returned. When the long heaven-sent days at Ffoulds must end, and they must go back to London, and Timothy to school,—and Oliver leave them. For in spite of torment these were halcyon days compared to those to come,—Timothy's school days. The time she had once dreaded more than anything in the world. Timothy growing up and leaving her. Oliver growing away and leaving her.

. . . . . .

September,—and the evenings growing in. Latent mists and heavy morning dews. The time for dahlias and Michaelmas daisies,—the last heat of summer and a harvest moon.

"God, what an evening——" Oliver leant over a gate in the garden.

"There'll be a full moon later on," Vivian said.

"The harvest moon. Let's go for a walk. In the woods, anywhere."

"Shall we?" Vivian spoke uncertainly.

"Let's start in the canoe and go up the river, and then get out and walk, if we want to," he said.

They crossed into the lane, unfastened the canoe and set off. Strange sounds came from night-living animals, and presently from a thicket a nightingale started to sing.

"Listen." They stopped.

"I must find it," Oliver said, "come on."

Out they clambered, he vaguely helping her to safety, and once landed bounding ahead to find his quest. Vivian struggled through undergrowth and nettles to where she

could hear him crunching dead twigs beneath his feet. At last she came to a clearing, and felt that strange feeling of knowing she had been there before—-of living a moment for the second time. It was uncanny. She called " Oliver," and heard an answering whistle ahead. A nightjar screamed and broke the stillness of the fast approaching night. Suddenly she was aware of a deep burring hum, something brushed her cheek—she realised it was only a flying night-beetle. If only it wasn't so dark—-the disquieting dim dusk that makes one blind to one's surroundings. She wished the moon would appear. And then, as if in answer to her thoughts, clouds parted above her, and the full harvest moon shone upon them ; lighting up the clearing, heralding the night.

And then she remembered. Remembered why it was she thought she knew the place. Her dream—nights back ? Weeks back ? Yes, there was the giant oak tree in the centre of the clearing. She shivered. Something brushed past her as she stood alone—in her dream she recollected a brown squirrel, but she had not time now to see what this had been. She looked round to see if there was a way out, and in front of her, beyond the oak was the same small wicket gate. She passed on, wondering if she were still dreaming, pushed it open, and found herself in the deserted garden. Vivian pulled her wrap closer round her—an owl began to screech close by ; and the full moon, as she looked at it, seemed to leer knowingly and wickedly at her. How near it seemed.

" Oliver, Oliver," she called out, " do come. You are a rotten escort."

And out of nowhere, it seemed, he appeared.

" Where on earth have you been ? " she asked. " You do look—extraordinary," she ended rather lamely.

She looked at him closely. His shirt was torn, his

flannels dirty, and his hair stood up untidy and awry—giving him the appearance, as never before, of a faun.

"Let's go back. I—don't like it terribly."

She told herself she must not look too long upon him. His eyes were dangerous. Dangerous to her peace—if peace she had any longer.

"Oh, don't be silly. We can't go. The evening's just begun. Look at the moon. I wish somebody would start to play, an elf-king or some piping Pan. I feel quite mad. I should love to dance."

"Don't—don't." Something, perhaps in her voice, startled him. For he stopped and came over quickly to her side.

"What's the matter?" And all at once he seemed gentle and usual again.

"Oliver—don't think me silly, but I've dreamed all this. I've been through the last quarter-of-an-hour exactly, and I know what's going to happen. Do let's go."

"Darling. . . ." And he threw back his head and roared with laughter.

"No—Oliver, I mean it."

"And will it be so very terrible?" he teased her.

"Yes. No. I don't remember. But do—please, let me go."

He put his hand on her shoulder and pulled her round towards him.

"Come here and sit down for a minute and then we'll go." Weakly she let herself be led by him. He took her to a seat and then sat down—and looking round she saw they were by the old fountain.

"Isn't it peaceful. And marvellous," he said.

"Yes."

"'Ill met by moonlight, proud Titania,'" and he laughed.

"Go on," she whispered.

"Ah, but you should give me your cue, you know," said Oliver.

"Must I?"

"Perhaps you can't!"

"'What! jealous Oberon! Fairies, skip hence: I have foresworn his bed and company.'" And Vivian looked down at Oliver lying at her feet.

"'Tarry, rash wanton! Am I not thy lord?'" and Oliver took the hand that was hanging listlessly from the bench.

"'Then, I must be thy lady.'" Vivian stopped. "I can't remember any more."

Oliver raised himself, and took her hands.

"Look at me."

And Vivian felt her eyes being drawn into his, held by them, kept by them, and before she could speak his arms were round her and he was kissing her mouth, her eyes, her throat.

"Oliver—Oliver—you're mad—you mustn't," she gasped, and he would not heed and only laughed.

"I love you, I love you."

. . . . . .

"We're mad, my sweet," she said presently. "It's just the strange beauty of the night that's turned our minds. We must forget it all—everything."

"Oh, rubbish," he exclaimed. "Don't talk as if our love was some monstrous thing."

"Oh, it's not that——"

"What is it then?" he got up and knelt beside her.

"I'm so frightened," she spoke in a whisper.

"Frightened? Of what? Your husband, me, the night? What?" His words jumbled together, he was drunk with the fire of loving for the first time. Everything seemed marvellous in his eyes—why should this woman be frightened?

"No, no, no. Oh, Oliver, you don't understand. It's myself I'm frightened of. And you. How can this lead anywhere? I can't cope with it. I'm frightened of losing you, and I must."

"Lose me? Silly one."

He sat on the seat, and put his arms round her.

"That feel safe?"

"Oliver, don't you realise I'm years older than you are?"

"What about it? You talk as if I were a boy—"

"Well—twenty-seven, or whatever it is—good heavens, you've all the best years of your manhood to come."

"They'll be my worst if you're not with me," he said, taking her hand and kissing her wrist.

"I couldn't bear it, if after a few months I saw you getting bored—realizing that I was old. . . ."

"Dear, my dear, does it matter? We're as old or as young as love makes us. Some people are white-haired and haggard at thirty, some look as fresh as spring at sixty. Anyhow, there's only one woman for me—that's you."

"What about Richard?"

"Do you love me?" he demanded.

"I don't know—I think I do."

"Then that's all that matters."

"Have you ever loved anyone completely?" he asked her, as she stood up.

Vivian sighed.

"I thought so once. Haven't you?"

"No," he answered.

Vivian turned to him.

"I wonder if I'm being wise."

"Is that all this means then?"

She looked at him and knew that in him only lay any future happiness.

"No," she whispered, and he held out his arms.

IX

"WHAT are we going to do about the future and everything?"

Oliver stopped playing the piano and wheeled round on his seat, facing Vivian.

"About Richard, you mean?"

"Yes—your husband, amongst other things. What d'you want to do?"

"I don't know. I don't think I've thought much. The last week has been so perfect."

"It can't last, though, my beautiful."

"No—Well, Richard will be home soon, I suppose."

"Do you want to come away with me?"

"You know I can't let you go now."

"It'll mean leaving Timothy."

"Leaving—Timothy?"

What a fool, what a wicked fool she was, she thought. In the vortex of emotions which she'd been through, the knowledge that a choice would have to be made had never struck her.

"I hadn't thought of that," she spoke slowly.

"Well—I don't suppose Mr. Hemmingway will care for parting with both of you." Oliver felt he was putting things badly. "Will you ask him for a divorce?" he said, presently.

"Oh, I suppose so."

"And if he refuses?"

"I should just leave him anyway. I don't think he will. Richard's very generous really."

"Do you love me enough to come whatever happens?" asked Oliver.

Vivian went to the piano, and took his hand in hers.

"I'm afraid so," she smiled.

She bent and kissed the top of his head.

"Go on playing to me," she said.

That night in bed, the vision of Timothy never left her. What must she do? It was a choice, she knew that. Which did she love most? Memories of Timothy as a baby kept floating before her. Timothy with bleeding knees, and drooping lip, wanting to be kissed and 'made better.' Timothy in rubber paddling-knickers, clutching her hand at the sea-side and pretending to be so brave as huge waves descended on them. Timothy tossing in bed with fever, eyes wild, and hot sweating curls clinging to his forehead, calling to her. Always "Mummy—Mummy" .... Oh, God, how could she leave him. Her baby, her son, her Timothy. She must have been mad. She would have to tell Oliver, and he would go, soon, at once. No good putting off the agony. Oliver must go, for ever. Oliver, and life, and love. . . . He loved her —passionately, divinely, completely. Had she the right to wreck his happiness? And what of Richard? Husband, child, lover. Lover, child, husband? Which came first? Timothy or Oliver? *She did not know.* Timothy fast growing up, away from her. Under Richard's care; but she was still his mother. Or Oliver, her heart's love, with no one at all except her. What would Timothy be able to give her in the years to come? And Richard, stolid, comfortable Richard, whose very presence bored her nowadays. Oliver was her lover and her child; she could not part from him. Never, never. And Timothy, her real baby. Duty? Love? Duty and Love? or Life and Love?

. . . . . .

When Vivian woke in the morning she found amongst other letters one from Richard. Tearing it open she read :

'DEAREST,

'I shall be back almost as soon as you get this. I've been able to wind up things suddenly, and there's no reason to put off sailing any longer than the day after to-morrow. I'm longing to see you and Tim and will send a cable or wire as soon as I know any definite date. I'm so glad he's fit again—and can go back to school. Give him my love and tell him I'm very pleased with him and thank him for his letters. No time for more, bless you.

'RICHARD.'

She rang for her breakfast, ran her bath and started to dress. When she got downstairs she went to look for Oliver, but he and Timothy were both out.

In the middle of the morning Vivian saw a telegraph boy coming up the drive.

"Telegram for Hemmingway," he said.

"That's all right. Give it to me."

She opened it—it was a wireless sent at sea, from Richard.

'Landing Liverpool Thursday, going straight to Chelsea. R.'

"That's all right," she said, and mechanically made her way to the house. She found Oliver in the hall.

"Read this," and she handed him the wire.

"Oh," Oliver said, and remained silent.

"I had a letter this morning. I looked for you and of course you'd gone out. You'd better read it."

She put her hand in the pocket of her coat and brought out Richard's letter.

"What are you going to do?" Oliver asked when he had read it.

"I shall go up to town to-morrow. This message was sent last night, you see—they're always so slow delivering them here. I don't know what time he'll land to-morrow and I shan't go to Liverpool. But I don't want him here."

"I don't see that you can very well prevent him," Oliver said.

"I shall try to. At any rate I couldn't bear meeting him here: it's—so much us. I shall stay in town to-morrow night, and I suppose I shall have to tell him. That'll stop him wanting to come down surely. He can't very well come here if you're here."

"Darling, he can kick me out!"

"I hadn't thought of that." She paused.

"It's going to be rather foul for him, this news. His first evening back," Oliver said slowly.

"I know. But what else can I do? I can't behave ordinarily to him—now that I love you."

"Why not let me go—away, I mean. And have him come down here. After all it's been your home for the last few months. Timothy's here. . . ."

"No, I can't. I must do this thing in my own way."

At lunch-time Vivian spoke.

"Timothy darling, Daddy's arriving back from Canada to-morrow."

The boy leapt in his chair.

"Oh, Mummie! How perfectly lovely! Oh, I am glad." And he sprang to his feet, dancing about the room.

"Will he be here to-morrow?" he asked.

"N-no. You see his ship doesn't land till to-morrow, and he wants to go to London first."

"Can we go and meet him?"

"Well, darling, I don't think so. I shall go," and

seeing the look of disappointment in his face she went on, "You see, sweet, we do want you to look awfully well and strong for Daddy, don't we? And it'd be very boring for you. He mayn't get in till late in the evening."

"I could rest. Couldn't I go home and just wait?" he begged.

"Home's all covered up in dust sheets, sweetheart, and it'd be a dreadful nuisance," she lied.

"Oh, all right," said Timothy, sighing.

He knew it was hopeless. Mummie just didn't want him to go. He thought it rather mean of her.

"You'll be a good boy and not mind very much, won't you? After all, you'll soon see Daddy, lots of him," and she looked at him for a long time.

Could she go through with it? His pouting mouth, she wanted to kiss the corners so badly, and his curly head. She sighed. Timothy was growing up so fast, he resented being kissed these days. She knew he put up with the good-night brand, but if ever she tried at other times he became impatient and wriggled away from her.

"D'you think we could have a gorgeous picnic on the river before we go back to London?" his voice broke in on her thoughts.

"Me and Daddy and Oliver and you?" he said.

"I don't know. We'll see."

Vivian started to fold her napkin and felt she could not look at either of them. She felt herself a traitor to both—and to Richard as well. It had all been so beautiful, but now a tarnish was beginning to creep over everything.

"Come on, Timothy old boy—time for your rest——"

Away in the distance she was aware of the two of them—the two beings she loved most—walking off, and talking of Richard. What irony, she thought. Timothy's chatter was filled with the word 'Daddy.'

Presently Oliver came to her across the lawn. He looked terribly young. She pulled out her bag and mirror and looked at herself. Worry was more ageing than anything in the world. Already she told herself she looked ten years older than yesterday. Supposing people laughed at them? Supposing they were taken for mother and son? That would happen very likely. Would she be able to bear it? And would Oliver feel ashamed?

"Come here—I want to talk to you. Seriously," she said, as he came up to her.

"Out with it," and he sat down beside her.

"Are you happy?" she asked.

"I'm going to be." He smiled and took her hand.

"I'm not so sure."

"What are you talking about?"

"Darling, listen. I think we're probably on the verge of making a frightful mistake. But we're only on the verge, and can stop ourselves from making it. I've been thinking. And I do feel I'm too old—in every way—for you to go linking yourself up with."

She hoped the thud of her heart wasn't as loud as she thought it was.

"Are you trying to tell me you want everything to—finish?"

"Well?"

There was a painful silence.

"You're bored with me, I suppose. But I love you, and I really thought you loved me——"

"Stop. Oliver—don't. It's because I love you. How can I let you waste yourself on me—because that's what it means really."

"You really think so? Good God, surely I'm the one

to judge that. I tell you, Vivian, if this is the end I won't answer for anything I do——"

"Now you're talking hysterically."

"I'm sorry. I didn't mean that."

There was another pause, and then Oliver said:

"If you don't want to marry me, if that's the chief thing you're afraid of you needn't worry. I want to marry you because I think you'd be—safer, if you know how I mean. I want to look after you and make you happy. I know you've been unhappy, and I feel I could make up for—some of it. But apparently I'm wrong."

"Oh, my darling, you're not. I do love you. More than anybody, more than anything. It's only because I'm so terrified of losing you—losing it all—that if it's got to be I'd rather it happened now than later."

"My Vivian . . . all this rot you talk about age . . . you're the youngest person I know."

"Oh, my dear," she laughed, and slipped her arm through his.

"There's something else I want to say," Oliver said presently.

"Well?" How strange, this all-absorbing love coming to her so late.

"Listen. When you and Richard have this thing out you won't let mere duty stop you from doing what you want, will you? I've been thinking about you, all the things you've told me about your life long ago—one thing and another—and, darling, I realise you're a bit of a coward. Don't let him talk you into doing what you might feel you ought to do. I'm talking for you as well as for myself. All your life you've given. Maybe some of the giving seemed grand at the time, but no one's ever loved you like I do."

"Richard loved me," she mused.

"You didn't love him, though—did you? In the way you love me. *Or did you?*" For one minute he seemed at a loss.

"No, no, no," cried Vivian. "Don't worry, dearest. I'll fight all right. Come and kiss me now—it's late. I must go to bed. I dread to-morrow, I admit it."

For a few minutes she stood by him, and felt his arms holding her close to his heart.

"I can't lose you, I can't," he said.

X

VIVIAN paced the drawing-room in the little house in Cheyne Row. Richard ought to be here at any moment.

Presently a taxi drew up to the door. She looked from the window. Yes, there was Richard, littering the steps with innovation trunks and various suitcases. He let himself into the house with a latch-key.

"Richard?" called Vivian from the top of the staircase.

"My dear, you're here, how grand." And he bounded up the stairs and threw his arms round her.

"It's marvellous to see you again," and he laughed.

"Young Tim down at Ffoulds with the tutor fellow, I s'pose." He went across the room and helped himself to a whisky and soda.

"Jove, Vivian, you look splendid. Those months in the country have suited you. You look years younger! Come and kiss me again."

He bent over and kissed her heartily on the forehead and lips.

"D'you think we can have dinner pretty soon?" he asked. "I'm as hungry as hell."

"I'll go and see that it comes in as soon as it can. It's splendid to see you looking so fit, too, Richard."

She left the room.

How strange she felt, as though she were taking part in some dream. It all seemed so unreal, she knew she was shy of Richard, that her manner would be forced during

the evening. How on earth would she be able to tell him everything? Perhaps it could be put off till to-morrow—but that would mean another day and night from Ffoulds probably, and every hour away from Oliver was agony to her.

During the dinner Richard talked. There was little left for her to do but listen. He talked of Canada and the business, of the people out there, of places he'd stayed at. And Vivian sat and tried to be interested, drawing him out more and more, determined to keep him off herself and Ffoulds.

"We must all go over there next year. Spend Timothy's summer holidays there. He'd love it, and I think you would, too. There's my uncle's ranch there for us at any time, marvellous riding, and plenty of sport. I'd like to live out there, Vivian. I'm seriously thinking of doing so. Of course it needs talking over, I'll have to go into it. And there's Tim to be considered as well. However, there's plenty of time."

Vivian said nothing; her courage was very slowly ebbing from her, as the colour was from her face.

"You're looking white. You all right?"

She heard his voice coming to her from out of space somewhere.

"I've got a headache, I think it's your cigar, d'you mind if we go into the other room?"

"Poor darling, what a shame. I'll put it out," and when she tried to remonstrate: "No, of course. Don't care a damn. Can't have you rotten on my first evening back." And he took her arm and pushed her into the drawing-room.

"Now tell me about Timothy," he began presently.

"I've brought a snapshot album up with me," said Vivian, "I thought you'd like to see some of him probably. And I didn't know when you'd be seeing him, it's hardly

worth you're going down there. We have to move out next week, and I expect you'll have a lot to do."

She spoke hurriedly, self-consciously.

"Nonsense," he laughed, "I shall come down for the week-end—your last. I want to see the place. You're a rotten letter writer, bless you, but Tim's were full of news. I gather young Parsons has been a success. I'm glad, he seemed quite a nice fellow. Bit quiet."

Vivian said nothing. Richard turned over the leaves of the album.

"M'm, looks charming. And what did you do with yourself all day?" He re-lit his cigar unthinkingly.

"Oh, I don't know. There's always a lot to do in one's own house. The gardens are big, too. I walked, and we played tennis, and went on the river, and bathed, usual sort of country life."

"I expect he was quite a companion for you. I'm glad. Bit young, of course."

"Timothy's terribly excited at the thought of seeing you," Vivian began.

"Bless his heart. When does he go back to school?"

"The end of next week," said Vivian.

"It'll be a bit dull for you in London after Ffoulds. You must get out more, darling. Meet more people. You're an awful old stay-at-home. The Harris's came back on the boat with me, they're tremendous bridge players. You'd like them. I'll get 'em to dine one night next week."

"I think I'll go up to bed now," said Vivian after a few minutes, "I feel tired, I don't know why."

"Righto. I'll have one more drink and turn in, too."

"Turn the lights off when you come, will you?" she called from the stairs.

Slowly Vivian undressed, and then lay back in her bath thinking.

What was there about Richard that irritated her? It wasn't just that she was in love with Oliver, and therefore automatically felt out of tune to him. In the old days she'd been very fond of him, he had been so kind, and always sweet to her. He was still kind, he still loved her, she knew, but it got on her nerves. As a companion he seemed useless. Was it all her fault? True, Timothy had changed her terribly. Perhaps when one stopped living with someone physically the mental side of everything changed, too. Surely that wasn't always the case? She wondered how he was going to take her request for a divorce. After all, for a long time now he must have looked upon her as a favourite piece of furniture, surely the wrench wouldn't be too bad for him. She got into bed and picked up a book from the side table and started to read. She heard Richard come upstairs and run a bath. He would come in and say good night to her, she supposed. She hoped he would come in before he went into the bathroom, he always took a long time, and she felt so sleepy. Presently she heard the bathroom door bang, followed by loud splashings. Vivian started to read once more, and then yawning, found she could not go on. Turning, she switched the light out and shut her eyes. Suddenly, just as she was dropping off to sleep the door opened and Richard stood on the threshold.

"What, gone to sleep already," he said in rather an aggrieved voice.

"I thought you weren't coming in. I waited till I heard you splashing and I was so tired I couldn't wait any longer," she said sleepily.

"Turn on the light, Vivian. I want to ask you something."

Vivian raised herself and put on the light. Richard sat down on the edge of the bed.

" Well—what is it ? " she asked.

" Listen. I've been thinking. I'm tired of the way we've been living. You're perfectly well now, said yourself you're fitter than you've ever been. Well . . . ? "

Vivian looked at him in amazement.

" What are you getting at ? " she asked.

" I want you to live with me again. I'll be careful, you needn't worry. But, damn it, you are my wife, we're both of us young, and I, well—I can't go on as I've been doing."

" I see," Vivian said.

" Thank you, darling. I thought you would. I know you're tired and I won't worry you any more now. But I'll sleep in here to-night, you don't mind, do you ? " He started to pull away the sheets from the bed.

Vivian pulled them to her, closely, as though to protect herself.

" You can't. You're mad. Go to your own room at once, please, Richard. When I said I see, I didn't mean what you obviously thought I did. I meant I saw your point. I can't live with you again—ever. Please, Richard, go and I'll talk to you about it to-morrow."

Richard's jaw set, and his expression was unpleasant. " Hysterical bloody nonsense ! " he exclaimed.

" Richard, you are being selfish. You're not being a bit like yourself," said Vivian.

" Selfish ! " he laughed, " I like that ! Because I ask for what's due to me. Unlike myself, because for years I've been a silly damn fool and let you have your own way. My God, if it's a case of being selfish you've no axe to grind."

Richard got up from the bed and started to pace the room.

" And why ? If you'd give me a legitimate reason. But you neither will nor can. It's not as though you hate the sight of me," he stopped. " Or do you ? "

"Oh, Richard, I shall have to tell you to-night, I suppose. I wanted to put it off till later, but I see it's no use. I want you to divorce me."

"Divorce. Why should I? I'm very fond of you. There are absolutely no grounds beyond this ridiculous fad of yours, which could be listed as incompatibility I daresay. No."

"That's where you're wrong, you see. I'm in love with somebody else, Richard."

Richard turned round, at first dumbfounded.

"This is the first I've heard of it," he stated rather pompously.

"Who on earth is he?"

"Oliver Parsons," she answered quietly.

"Young Parsons?" his voice sounded incredulous. "Are you mad? Really, Vivian, if it wasn't that I believe you're serious I'd have a good mind to laugh. Parsons . . . he's young enough to be your son. I'm damned if I'm going to swallow this."

"You're speaking rather stupidly, Richard. I know Oliver's younger than I am, but I could hardly have had him at the age of eleven; that's all the difference."

"Are you really serious? Or are you using his name as a blind with which you think I'm going to be put off? Because if you are I can tell you here and now you can cut that out."

"You needn't worry. I've told you the truth. I love Oliver, and that being so it's impossible for me to live as your wife."

"A pleasure I haven't known for some time, I might add."

"Oh, I'm sorry. I know I've been a rotten wife in some ways. That side of it all has meant so little to me, you know."

"And now? Are you just going off with a soul-mate? I believe that's the word people of your calibre call their lovers. A lot of——"

"Is there any point in keeping up this argument, Richard?" Vivian's voice began to shake. "Will you divorce me?"

"My cold Vivian, if you can bring yourself to give me proofs of why I should I'll start to think about it. I doubt your whole yarn, it may surprise you to hear."

"Oh, I knew it'd all have to become sordid and beastly," said Vivian.

Richard shrugged his shoulders.

"You can't eat your cake and have it, my dear."

He walked to the window and neither of them spoke. Presently he turned and in a kinder tone:

"See here, Vivian, don't go taking these leaps and plunges. It's unlike you; wait a while and think it over, dear. I'm sorry if I rattled you just now. I guess it's only because you surprised me so. I won't worry you, I'll even swear not to ask you to put up with me again. For the time being, anyway. Damn it all, girl, the past can't go for nothing. You and I have always been the grandest of pals. . . ."

"Have we?" she laughed rather bitterly and thought that Richard was being rather obvious.

"Of course we have. I'm sorry if I blundered to-night. Vivian, don't go doing things you'll only hate and be everlastingly sorry for. Think of Tim, even if you don't think of me. That kid would be miserable without you. When I think of what a mother you've been to that boy, how your life's centred round him, and now you want to chuck it all for an idea—for that's what it is——"

"An ideal you mean."

"That proves it. You're unstrung, my dear. Don't see

him. I daresay he's attractive and paid you a lot of attention, and done and talked about things I've never done. I daresay I've bored you. I didn't realise it before, conceited old fool that I am. But think. Think before you smash up your home. This boy—you're only a phase. It's something they all go through, falling for women years older than 'emselves. He'll tire, perhaps sooner than both of you imagine. I daresay he thinks he's sincere, but it's not like you to be carried away. It's his brain, the way he does things, plays the piano, that's got you. He wouldn't only stop at that, my dear, young men are very selfish when they're in love. You wouldn't care for it for long. Has he made love to you at all? Knowing you as I do, I ask because I can well imagine this has been a pretty high-minded affair."

There was a pause.

"I'm his mistress." Vivian lied to him.

Richard walked to the end of the bed.

"Say that again." He spoke incredulously.

"Why? Why should I? But very well, for all that it's worth, I am his mistress."

"Good God!" Horror as well as amazement crept into his voice.

"At last you begin to understand," said Vivian.

"It's . . . foul," he said the two words slowly, unutterable disgust to his voice.

"Richard, I should never have expected you to say that. I mean to sound as if you were so terribly shocked and—and horrified. It's not such an appalling thing; yours wouldn't be the first divorce in the world, nor the only one." Vivian's voice took courage.

"That you should do a thing like this! You who've always been so damn cold where anything of that sort's concerned. I can't get over it."

"Richard, why won't you face the fact it's your pride that's suffering chiefly."

"Because it's not true. Only just now I told you I loved you——"

"Well, I'm sorry, Richard. But you see how impossible that is."

"That boy! That's what I can't get over."

A long pause followed.

"Richard!" Something in her voice made him turn.

"Yes?"

"D'you remember years and years ago, when first I met you in Switzerland, and I was going through a very hard time? You were wonderfully kind to me then—I shall never forget it. Generous when so many people would have spurned me to the other ends of the earth. Why are you so different now? You've always seemed to me so understanding over other people's unhappiness. You once said to me, who were you to judge other persons' lapses. I was the other person then. Won't you be generous now?"

"That was all long ago. You were very young then, I was desperately sorry for you. One gets harder as one gets older——"

"Or softer."

"You weren't my wife then. My wife!" he laughed bitterly, "Timothy's mother. Does all that go for nothing?"

"You're being melodramatic, Richard," said Vivian.

"Oh, really."

"D'you think I haven't weighed over everything in my mind? D'you imagine leaving Timothy won't break my heart?" she began.

"Yet you're set upon going through with it all? Vivian! Breaking your heart my foot!"

"Oh, Richard, Richard, don't go on like this. I do want a little happiness before I'm too old."

"And your way of getting it is to leave a fond husband, a comfortable home, a child that adores you and that you've spoilt all his life, to forsake all this and go off with a young schoolmaster so young that most places you'll go to he'll be taken for your son. Vivian. . . ."

"Speak like that if you want to. I've made up my mind. Oliver loves me, really loves me, as I've never been loved before in all my life. And I love him. You'll admit I never pretended even to you that I was ever more than very fond of you. For years now your work's been more to you than anything. . . ."

"And whose fault is that if it's true—which it isn't," he said.

"I mean little more than a word to Timothy now. I'm his mother, but gone is all that baby love that was so much —everything, to me. You're his god now, perhaps boys are like that. He wants men round him, and other boys. He resents each kiss I ever give him. If I gave up Oliver I should merely exist till I'm old, living on old and bitter memories of what I might have had, and threw away."

"Excuses, Vivian, excuses," said Richard.

"No. It's all true."

There was silence for a time.

"Well, what are you going to do about it?" she asked wearily.

"I don't know. I'm going to leave you now. I shall try and think of what to do. It's all so terribly unexpected. I'll try and be fair, but it's a jolly welcome to come back to!" He went out of the room and closed the door.

. . . . . .

It was after ten when Vivian woke next morning. She rang for her breakfast-tray and said:

"Is Mr. Hemmingway in, or has he gone out?"

"He went out about twenty minutes ago. There's a note for you on the tray."

Vivian tore open the letter and read:

'DEAR VIVIAN,

'You gave me a hideous shock last night, but I'm not going to divorce you. You see, I don't believe in this yarn of yours entirely. You may have fallen in love, or think you have; I cannot believe that it is anything but a passing fancy. *I will not believe* (this was heavily underlined) that you're ready to give Tim up, the biggest thing in life you've always sworn, for a passionate infatuation of a few weeks' standing. I beg you to think things over. I cannot pretend what you have told me will not make a difference to our own relationship. I'm stunned by the thought that you of all women should so cheapen yourself. But now I'm not asking you to hesitate before taking such a grave step for my sake, but for Tim's. I see no reason why you should expect me to be generous where he is concerned. Any Court would give me custody over him, and I should not hesitate to take full advantage. If you do go through with the business—and I beg you not to—I see no prospect of a decent future for you. No son of mine is going to trundle around after you, I should not dream of allowing it. Therefore think, Vivian, before you take the step. If you decide to remain I shall do my best to forget all that you have told me. It will not be easy, but I shall endeavour to be fair for the boy's sake.

'RICHARD.'

XI

"You're an extraordinary woman."

Oliver was standing in front of the fire which was burning in the drawing-room. He had lit his pipe, and was feeling half amused, half resentful at the recollection of supper, their last at Ffoulds.

"Do you realise we barely spoke to each other? Do you realise how amazingly uncommunicative you have been about your visit to London? This is Sunday; we leave this place to-morrow; you've been back forty-eight hours at least and whenever I ask you to tell me what happened between you and Richard you deliberately change the subject. Why?"

Vivian looked up from the writing-desk where she appeared to be collecting papers.

"Darling, you know how busy I've been. As you said just now, we go to-morrow——"

"Don't prevaricate."

There was a pause.

"You went to Town to see your husband about your future, our future, so it isn't so very surprising I'm a little puzzled at your silence."

"Don't worry me, Oliver," she spoke almost impatiently.

"I suppose he won't consent to a divorce?"

She nodded.

"What are we going to do then?"

Suddenly Vivian's nerves gave way and she broke down.

"I don't know," she sobbed brokenly. "I can't give you up, why should I?"

He went over to where she sat and tried to comfort her.

"Why did I ever come into your life if I'm only to cause you misery?" he muttered, kissing her hair.

"You don't make me miserable, sweetheart," she answered, "it's the awful not knowing what to do that makes me miserable."

She took a handkerchief from his pocket.

"Oh, I know what I ought to do, of course," she continued.

"Darling, you've a right to happiness, we both have a right. Whether," he went on after a pause, "you'd be happy if you came away with me I cannot tell you. I only know that I'd do any mortal thing on earth for you."

"My darling——"

Vivian got up and walked towards the window. "I can't believe summer is over, our summer."

She sighed again as she spoke. His words knocked at her heart, the words he had spoken a few minutes ago. How could she tell along which path her happiness lay? Happiness and duty had an uncomfortable habit of separating themselves all too often, although until now the two had marched in unison easily enough. Hitherto nothing had come to interfere seriously with herself and Timothy.

"I don't want you to do something you'll regret all your life," Oliver began.

She thought of Richard's letter.

"God knows I worship you, and it's all I can do not to plead my own cause to you, but——" he hesitated, "couldn't you go away for a bit, away from all of us, and try to know your own heart?"

"I know my own heart, beloved," she smiled at him, "it's yours."

"And you won't fail us?" He caught hold of her roughly, and kissed her with a passion that she had known from no one else.

"Don't be afraid, darling mine," she said a little shakenly, "I shan't let you down. Timothy has been my life until now, I know that. But I've never known before the feelings I have for you. They're too strong for me to do anything but follow their call." Vivian kissed him. "And now you must let me go, my dearest. I must finish packing and seeing to a hundred and one things."

"Can't I help you?"

"Bless you, no."

"It's late, later than I thought. Did you go upstairs after supper to say good-night to Timothy?"

"No." She spoke shortly. "I said good-night to him before he went to bed."

She did not tell him that she had deliberately broken the usual custom, so afraid had she been of her new defences falling before the first onslaught of the boy's affection.

. . . . . .

"Is Mr. Hemmingway in yet?" Vivian asked, as Parker, her parlourmaid, received them the following afternoon.

"Mr. Hemmingway went to Birmingham on Saturday, ma'am," the servant replied. "He expected to be home this evening some time. He knew Master Timothy would be arriving to-day with Helen, but he said he thought you might be remaining in the country to clear everything up. Cook got some dinner prepared in case——"

"That's all right. I shall dine out anyway," Vivian

said, trying to sound unconcerned. Perhaps it was all for the best, she thought, as she went upstairs to the nursery. There was no point in seeing Richard really, and she had arranged to meet Oliver at the Maison Basque for dinner before catching the train to Scotland. She could hardly believe that in a few hours she would have left Cheyne Row, Richard—Timothy. That life was to begin afresh for her with Oliver. Perhaps in the far-away Scottish island to which he was taking her she would find the 'little more' that all her life had eluded her. Perhaps Oliver's love would make her forget Timothy.

At that moment she heard the little boy's voice calling her. She looked into the nursery where he was having tea.

"I've got honey, it's gorgeous." He spoke with his mouth full. "And Mrs. Brown made a ginger cake 'specially. Come and have some."

"I don't think I want any, precious. You know I never have tea," she said, her eyes lingering on the happy face, now sticky with honey and cake crumbs.

"'cept for picnics," he answered. "Gosh! you and Oliver ate so many cucumber sandwiches on picnics I wonder you weren't very sick indeed. Mummie, hasn't Daddy come back yet?"

"Not yet, sweetie. He went to Birmingham on business, I suppose."

"I do wish he'd hurry. I did hope he'd be back before I went to bed. Will he?"

"I don't know."

"I'm glad I'm going back to school to-morrow you know," he remarked.

"Are you? I thought you loved being at Ffoulds."

"I did, fairly. But it'd be dreary in the winter with only you and Oliver."

"Oh!"

"Oliver was jolly nice, but school's ever so much more fun. The other boys and everything."

"But you did like Oliver?" she asked anxiously.

"Oh yes, he was all right. I liked him at first awfully. He got sort of unjollier. I'm much gladder we're home. Just me and Daddy and you."

He got up from the table and went to the wireless.

"I'll see what silly old children's hour is," he said.

Vivian went to her bedroom. It seemed pointless to unpack. On the other hand, she did not want to take all her clothes to Scotland. Presently she heard the front door bang, and for a moment she felt sick.

"Is that you, Richard?" she called out.

Parker's voice answered her.

"It's the evening papers, ma'am."

Vivian sorted a few things into a suit-case and then went downstairs to the drawing-room. A bright fire was burning, and she thought how pretty the room looked. Parker had put chrysanthemums about the place. A wave of depression took hold of her. She sat down by her writing desk and wondered what she could say in a letter to Richard.

Presently Helen knocked on the door.

"Master Timothy has had his bath and hopes you'll go up and say good-night," she said. "And what about your keys, madam? Wouldn't you like me to unpack your things?"

Vivian made an excuse and bade her tell Timothy she would go to him immediately. She looked at the time, it was already a quarter to seven, and she was supposed to be meeting Oliver at half-past. She found Timothy in bed, still wrapped in his Jaeger dressing-gown and looking rather dejected.

"I thought if I went to bed 'specially early, Daddy would come home."

"He'll be here soon," she said, trying to keep her voice even.

"Shall I stay awake for him?"

"Pet, I don't know what you'd better do."

She looked at his face flushed with heat from the evening bath, and wondered if it were possible that she was bidding him good-night for the last time.

"Read to me," he begged.

"I can't," she said, "I'm going out to dinner."

"Will Daddy have to have his alone?"

His voice sounded indignant.

"I don't think he can be coming back in time. Anyway I've arranged to go out."

She spoke harshly in order to keep tears from her voice.

"I wish it was to-morrow."

"Why, my sweet?"

"Then we'd be bound to be all here. All of us."

There was silence. Vivian could not trust herself to speak.

"I'm sleepy," Timothy yawned. "I'll see Daddy in the morning, won't I?"

"Yes."

"How awful it'd be if I was Lockett major," he spoke slowly, pulling the quilt round him.

"Why?" asked Vivian.

"'Cos they're divorced."

Her heart missed a beat.

"What do you mean, Timothy?"

"Lockett major's mother and father. They're divorced."

"What do you know of divorce? Who's told you anything about it?"

Already fear like an icy hand gripped her.

"Lockett major," he answered. "He has two fathers and a mother, only he doesn't often see his mother and one of his fathers. They stay somewhere else, and he lives with the father he's always known."

"I see."

"His mother takes him to a theatre sometimes. I don't understand it all nor does Lockett major, but he's jolly unhappy without his mother. He pretends he isn't, but I know he is, 'cos Lockett minor says so."

"And what does Lockett minor feel?"

Vivian spoke anxiously.

"He doesn't feel anything."

Timothy reached for the glass of milk which stood beside his bed.

"How sensible of him," she tried to speak brightly.

"Well, I should jolly well *loathe* it if you lived somewhere else. You won't ever will you? I say, I do wish daddy would come. I shan't stay awake much longer."

Vivian bent down and pressed his sleepy little form close to her.

"My baby, my Timothy, my precious," she whispered in agony.

"See you—morning," he mumbled, but when she released him she noticed he was already asleep.

. . . . . .

Richard Hemmingway looked at his watch. It was after eleven o'clock and he felt tired. The journey from Birmingham in an overheated and overcrowded railway carriage, the solitary meal taken at his club, and the return to Cheyne Row to find Tim asleep and no sign of Vivian —not even a note from her—filled him with weariness and misgiving. He looked down at the old spaniel, who

was stretching in front of the fire which had gone out, and finished a whisky and soda.

"Want to go out? Come on then." He led the way to the front door, opened it and waited while the old dog inspected various lamp-posts. He whistled, and the dog trotted back, and Hemmingway was fastening the latch of the door when he heard a taxi draw up, stop and be paid off and footsteps come as though to his house. He opened it again and saw Vivian approach. Neither spoke as he closed the door after her. She went into the drawing-room and slowly took off her coat.

"I thought you'd—gone," he said quietly.

"I meant to go."

He looked at Vivian; noticed the ashen face, the drawn eyes, the listless stoop of shoulders heavy laden with pent-up misery.

"I left the house to-night meaning to go for ever," she said dully.

"What made you change your mind?" he asked.

"Something Timothy said this evening. It's haunted me ever since. I dined with Oliver, we were to go to Scotland to-night. But all the time I thought of Timothy. I couldn't, I couldn't, I couldn't. . . ."

"Here," he poured her out a whisky and soda, "take this."

He noticed her hand felt like ice as she took the tumbler from him.

"What did Timothy say?" he asked.

"It was something about a boy at his school whose parents are divorced. I didn't know he knew about that sort of thing. He seemed to think it frightful."

For once Richard was at a loss to know what to say to his wife. She looked 'all-in' he thought, and he guessed the evening with young Parsons had been pretty good hell.

"Have you come back—for good?" he enquired almost diffidently.

"I said good-bye to Oliver."

Looking at her face, Richard realized it would be cruel to ask further questions.

At the foot of the stairs Vivian stopped.

"I haven't asked whether you mind me coming home?" she said wearily.

"You know I hoped you would."

She went upstairs to her room and started to undress slowly. Her dreams of love were over, shattered. There was no to-morrow for her and Oliver; she would never see him again nor, she knew, would he try to persuade her into doing so. She tried to banish the memory of his face as it had looked when she had told him she was not going.

Presently she heard Richard come upstairs and pause outside her door.

"Are you all right?" he asked quietly, as though afraid of someone hearing them.

She opened the door, and tried to smile.

"Here's something to make you sleep," he said.

"How kind you are."

She looked at him uncertainly and then spoke.

"Richard, there's something I want to tell you. Probably you'll not believe me. I told you Oliver and I were lovers. It wasn't true."

There was a pause.

"I find your innocence easier to believe in than your guilt," he spoke quietly. "Go to bed now and try to sleep."

Slowly Vivian walked across the room to her bed. For the moment all feeling had left her, it was as though her soul and spirit were numbed. Beside her bed lay some

books. She opened one, a tattered edition of Browning. She turned the pages and searched. . . .

A clock struck one o'clock. Far away she heard the distant rumblings of a train. She thought of Oliver, already many miles away. Suddenly from upstairs there came a sound. She listened for a minute, then realized it was Timothy coughing in his sleep. She turned and put out the light, and as she did so the lines re-echoed through her brain. 'The little more how much it is, the little less what worlds away.'

"The little more," she whispered.